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O RARE  
BEN JONSON



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TO  
B. T. S.  
AND  
J. F. S.





*Fetch me Ben Jonson's skull and fill't with sack,  
Rich as the same he drank, when the whole pack  
Of jolly sisters pledg'd, and did agree  
It was no sin to be as drunk as he:  
If there be any weaknesse in the wine,  
There's Virtue in the cup to make't Divine.*

ANON. C. 1640.



*O RARE BEN JONSON*







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### I

COPERNICUS IS DEAD and gone eleven years, but that makes no difference to anyone but an astronomer or two. The astronomers are reading Copernicus's big book. Everyone else continues to consider himself the centre of things, on this, the centre of the universe.

Over in England, for example, as the ax descends upon the neck of poor Lady Jane Grey, Mary Tudor feels quite sure of herself. Copernicus means nothing to her. No one means anything but Mary — rather, Mary and the Pope. Henry VIII is dead, young Edward is dead. And it is due mainly to the stubborn silence of that wild Sir Thomas Wyatt (who does not in the least resemble his famous father, the sonnet-maker) that the Princess Elizabeth is not dead. She is merely in retirement — for Mary's health.

Mary feels very healthy. She proposes to her cousin Philip, prince of Spain. He accepts unenthusiastically,

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egged on by his father. He comes to England, marries, tires of the climate as well as of his wife, despairs of ever having an heir, returns alone to Spain.

Meanwhile, fires blaze all over England. The fuel is Protestants. A few years ago it was Catholics, but the fashion has changed. Laws against Catholics are repealed, laws against Protestants passed. Protestants fill the jails. The crown confiscates their estates. Henry VIII turns in his grave, appears in visions to his daughter, raging impotently.

This is 1554.

By the light of the fires, everyone in and out of jail is writing poems and learning Greek. The Renaissance is on in full swing. Even Mary cannot quite stop it.

UP in the rocklands of Scotland, in Annandale, there had lived, while Henry VIII reigned in England, a certain rocky Presbyterian nobleman. This Scotchman was rather different from his fellow peers. Most of these lairds followed closely in the mediæval tradition. Like Richard the Lion Heart, like Barbarossa, and like Robert Bruce, they were but overgrown and very boisterous children. In some unaccountable way, however, the laird of Annan had heard the roaring of the dismaying wave of culture which was engulfing England.

It fascinated him.

When he could at last assure himself that Henry VIII



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permitted Protestants in England, he sold all his rocky pastures, left Scotland, and purchased a vast lot of meadows and greenwoods about Nottingham.

Here, where Robin Hood and his green men had run wild a few centuries before, he built a huge rambling house, very hospitable- and un-Scotch-looking, with its soft red bricks, white plaster, and many shining, swinging windows. Settling down with his wife and their stocky, undecorative son, he began to collect a library and a vast amount of culture. He had just mastered the alphabet, however, when he suffered an attack of brain-fever. The tender attentions of his physician hastened his end.

The son, now lord of the manor, continued his own education under a tutor. He developed into an anti- ( ( quarian. He read the classics with enjoyment, but could not take the slightest interest in the contemporary literature springing up all over England. The Presbyterian element in him was predominant. He read the Vulgate constantly, Petrarch but seldom, and Petrarch's English imitators not at all.

His copy of the Scriptures he filled with marginal notes. He aspired to the prowess of Joshua. The book of Revelation pleased him especially. He often read aloud from it, sitting out in the beech woods. Peasants gathering faggots would be filled with terror, to hear a deep rough voice intoning: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord God, who

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is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." At times he wished he had been born a woman. Then he could have become the bride of the Lamb.

Henry VIII died, young Edward reigned.

The young man in Nottingham continued to read Scripture. Prominent divines were his guests. They conducted learned theological disputations over their ale. Mounds of mutton disappeared during an argument as to whether or not "Christ's cross and Adam's tree stood in one place." Like most of the early English Protestants, they were never inclined towards asceticism. Their zeal always seemed to vary directly as their appetite.

Edward died.

One day in 1554 the young Presbyterian was reading as usual, stretched out in a broad window-seat, with the huge Bible resting on his knees. The day was warm, and sunlight streamed in through the leaded glass, making coloured patterns on the closely printed pages. The young man fell into a doze. Suddenly a great noise echoed through the house. Someone was plying the great knocker with abandon.

A group of agents entered the room. They were from the Queen, they said. It seemed that the young man had neglected to sign certain declarations — submission to the Pope, allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church.

The young man scowled. In a loud voice he quoted a

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passage from the book of Revelation. The royal agents looked blank. Not for long. Vigorously the loyal young Protestant spat at them. At each of them, lest one mistake his meaning. He was at once seized and bound, dragged off to prison, escaping execution only because of his "passive submission."

The Queen took the big house and presented it to an Irish earl.

BLOODY MARY became unpopular. After Philip's flight she turned with even greater energy to the work of rooting out heresy. Always pugnacious, she became by turns fanatical and morose.

Crowds gathered about those condemned to die and, even when they did not agree with them or take any interest in their religious beliefs, cheered them, encouraged them with shouts and prayers. Uprisings and plots arose. And often Mary would find abusive notes and pamphlets on her pillow, or thrown in through her window.

When, at last, she died, with Calais written on her heart, the young Presbyterian had been in jail for four years.

He, as well as all the rest of England, looked forward to a better period under the formerly despised Elizabeth. In the first parliament under the new queen the form of the modern Church of England was established. All religious prisoners were liberated.



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While in jail, our friend had decided to dedicate his life to the Lamb. A living could easily be obtained in the new Church. After disputing successfully with himself as to the identity of the official English and the Presbyterian Gods, he subscribed to what later became the Thirty-Nine Articles, and obtained a fairly remunerative living in the parish of Westminster.

Here he soon married a woman of strong personality. She was the daughter of a London tailor, barely able to read or write, but full of a religious fire as strong as her husband's. Between them they managed the parish very efficiently. They lived a comfortable life, made pleasant for each of them by a rather fierce companionship and affection. Battles were not unknown, for the clergyman could not forget that he was a gentleman — or at least the son of one — and that his wife was a tailor's wench.

This woman felt solitary and cheerless when, in the winter of 1572-3, her husband caught a cold and died "of a fever."

Through the kindness of the church officials she was permitted to remain in the parish house for a month after her husband's death. At the end of that time her only child was born. He was baptized in Old Testament fashion, and his mother felt confident that she was bestowing piety upon him when she named him Benjamin.



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## 2

IN Elizabethan London, wit and learning counted for much. The Italian Renaissance scholar, modified unconsciously by English air, ale, and oak, was the ideal. The historian William Camden, for instance, came close to this model. The son of a famous painter, he had had a stormy career at Oxford, left without a degree, and come to London. Here he devoted himself to the study of British antiquities, in which he had been interested since childhood. In 1575, through the influence of his friend the Dean of Westminster, he had secured the post of second master at Westminster School, one of Queen Elizabeth's favourite institutions. Thus assured of royal patronage, he had been able to spend much of his time upon his favourite studies, and he passed the vacations in scholarly tours of the British Isles.

At last, in 1586, his enormous volume, *Britannia*, was published. It is a voluminous compendium of British history, geography, manners, written in elegant Latin. Genealogies of the noble families are given in full, battles and campaigns described minutely, classical precedents given for every act of the British kings, every ruin on the British Isles accounted for. This book contained precisely the right mixture of classical learning and British patriotism to captivate Elizabethan Eng-

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land. In four years it passed through nine editions. Camden was acclaimed the greatest scholar in England, became the lion of the town, and refused a knighthood.

He was a kindly man, loving his pupils and loved by them. Despite his scholarly excursions into the past, he lived entirely in the present. He had been an enthusiastic and admiring friend to Sir Philip Sidney, he encouraged young writers who came to see him.

Now and then he took a short vacation from fame. Roaming incognito about London, he watched "the newe England breathe."

This habit led him, one afternoon, to the square in which stood old Charing Cross. As he was examining the carved figure of Queen Eleanor, already three centuries old and crumbling, he was disturbed by a loud hubbub which arose behind him.

Turning, he saw a group of small boys rush around a corner out of one of the narrow streets, screaming: "Coat-tails! Coat-tails! Fresh country coat-tails!" Repeating their battle-cry, they hurried across the square. After them rushed their pursuer, a short chunky boy, tripping at every step upon the tails of an obviously adult greatcoat. Screaming out the vilest curses, he ran after them, but they disappeared in the maze of old alleys, their cry of "Coat-tails!" still ringing faintly in the distance.

Unconscious that he was observed, the tormented



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child stopped in the middle of the square and, taking a deep breath, screamed in a terrifying voice.

*"Sclerati! Detestabiles! Catilinæ!"*

His voice went hoarse, and even before he had finished the last word, the child began to sob, and soon burst into loud angry weeping, flinging himself down on the old cobble-stones of the square, his head buried in his arms.

Camden could not resist this combination of Latin and misery. He hurried over and was soon consoling the child. Gradually the lad recovered a glum composure.

Benjamin Jonson was his name, he said. He went to a school in St. Martin's Lane. The boys who had run away were his class-mates. "They always plague me when I wear this coat. It was good once. My grandfather gave it to me because no one called for it."

"An excellent coat," said Camden kindly. "Merely a trifle loose."

As they walked across the square together, he learned that the boy lived with his mother and his stepfather, who was a master bricklayer. The child was evidently proud of the fact that his own father had been a clergyman.

The bricklaying trade must be a well-paid one, thought Camden, if Ben went to a private school, even a poor one.

Camden began to quiz the child. He conversed eas-

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ily in Latin, intelligibly in Greek. He read a great deal, he said — spent most of his time reading. Ancient history he seemed to know thoroughly, British history poorly. His manner was gruff and short, and though he seemed to long to parade his knowledge before this learned gentleman, a surly fear of emotion evidently restrained him.

When Camden left him, at the Abbey, saying that he hoped to see more of him, the child merely grunted. But as soon as Camden entered the building, he rushed away, almost beside himself with vanity, to tell his mother how cleverly he could talk with a gentleman.

THAT evening, after Ben had gone to bed, Camden called upon the bricklayer and his wife. Trade was not so brisk as he had imagined — Ben might have to be taken out of school, he discovered.

He informed them who he was. Ben's mother was respectfully courteous, endeavoring not to show her curiosity. She conversed with Camden with ease and animation. Her husband sat by the fire and smoked, nodding absently now and then.

Finally Camden made certain proposals. The mother assented eagerly and enthusiastically. The bricklayer spat into the fire. "Well, Annie," he drawled, "he's your boy and I'm willin' he should waste his time if you are. For a while, mind you, though, for a while." He shrugged his shoulders and nodded lazily. But his

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wife and Camden were already deep in conversation again.

Upon Camden's departure, a short argument took place. The mother won, and she sat up all night, cutting, sewing.

The next morning an excited boy, dressed in a very new-looking greatcoat, ran hurriedly past his amazed school-mates in St. Martin's Lane. A moment later he arrived breathless, grateful, and temporarily inarticulate, in the great hall of Westminster School.



### 3

FIVE years passed.

Ben had been twelve when Camden discovered him. ✓  
Even if his greatcoat had not been ludicrous, he would have been plagued by his class-mates anyway, because he took his school work so seriously.

At the age of twelve he had been a boastful young pedant, muttering Latin to everyone, despising whoever could not answer him. He did not look like a child. His head was enormous, covered with a wild mop of blazing red hair, and seemed to be attached to his body without the means of a neck. His face was stolid and old-looking, his features irregular. He was always intensely pale, except when angry. Then his

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face turned a dark red, his whole body seemed to swell, until he resembled an old man just before an attack of apoplexy.

But Camden did not require a beauty. He had respect for the boy's mental ability and soon won his affection. There was a youthful ardour in the boy, but hidden, and put to unusual ends.

After five years with Camden, Ben was as accomplished a scholar as almost any man in London. Enormously widely read in Greek and Latin literature, he could repeat long passages out of Homer and Virgil, whole poems of Anacreon. Catullus and Horace he would at times translate into English verse, crabbed and heavy, but superior to the work done by Camden's other pupils. He had read everything by Aristotle he could find, much of Plato, all the dramatists and historians. He devoured Xenophon, Diodorus, Polybius, Appian, Strabo.

This learning did nothing to make the boy more pleasant or agreeable. He never played. His entire time was spent in reading, his entire existence was with books. Pedantic when he first entered Westminster, after five years he was a classic encyclopædia, insufferably rude. At eighteen he had become so hopelessly queer, so offensively boastful, such a doddering hermit, that even Camden felt a twinge of guilt whenever he looked at him.

Camden was far from being anything like the popular



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conception of a scholastic. He was full of that enthusiastic combination of life and learning which is in the word "Elizabethan." Ben, on the contrary, combined the worst features of scholastic and academic.

"He must be thrown into a whirlpool," thought the old man. And as he looked about for an opportunity to do this, one was thrust upon him.

THE bricklaying trade was picking up. London was changing from a wood and stone city to a brick one. Houses and shops and garden walls had to be built, and Mr. Thomas Fowler was making money.

He sent gang after gang of workmen out. Still there was work to be done.

"Annie," he said one night, "why should a fat and hulking boy of eighteen spend his days in school when he could be earning eighteen shillings a week under his own stepfather?"

Annie smiled. She had been wondering about it, too, lately. For Ben was insufferable about the house. He boasted, he sulked, he quarrelled, he flew into vile fits of temper.

"No reason in the world, Thomas," said his wife. "I'll tell him about it tonight."

The bricklayer patted his wife's arm. She was as sensible as anyone could be after being a clergyman's wife for ten years.

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Later in the evening Fowler sat smoking peacefully by the fire. Suddenly a series of enraged screams burst forth from the upper floor. He smiled, grinned.

"I won't! I won't!" the voice screamed. "Bricks, bricks, bricks! A clod of earth! Change a gentleman, a clergyman, for a bricklayer! *Stultissimus! Vulgaris!* Dullards! Ignorance! Tyranny!"

Another voice spoke decisively, quietly.

Fowler began humming.

Screams, howls, and curses flew down from upstairs.

The man by the fire lit his pipe and chuckled to himself.

The low voice spoke again, then stopped. An upstairs door slammed, shaking the house.

Mrs. Fowler descended the stairs and came quietly into the kitchen. The long unexercised energy which had rushed forth from Ben's mouth had made her pale. She found her husband smoking peacefully. They both smiled, he chuckled.

The woman poured him out a flagon of ale and he began to sing softly:

*"I cannot eat but little meat,  
My stomach is not good. . . ."*

She sat down beside him and he took her hand in his. For a prosperous bricklayer, thought the clergyman's widow, he was not so bad.

The next morning Ben was at school before the build-

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ing was opened. He sat on the door-step, and thought unhappily. He had decided to run away. He could not bear the thought of bricks, day-labour, Fowler. But first he would tell Camden. He would surely not let his best, most brilliant pupil be set to a trade, Ben thought. He would speak to Ben's mother, show her her injustice, her ——

The door of the school was opened from inside, and Ben fell backwards on to the stone floor. Cursing the jeering servant, he rushed up the stairs to Camden's room. He pounded the knocker, pushed open the door without waiting. Camden looked up, mild and surprised.

The boy spoke incoherently, too fast. He had to repeat. "My mother says I must leave school and lay bricks. I won't do it. You'll help me, won't you?" He was red and panting.

Camden could hardly believe the good news. "I will help you. I shall let you obey your mother. You are more pedantic than I by far. You need action, out of doors. You will get it. Come to see me often."

"You will do nothing for me? I thought you cared for me. Now I must run away." The boy spoke incredulously, sobbed.

Camden succeeded with difficulty in assuming a stern and flinty countenance.

"If you do not obey your mother, I shall no longer be your friend. London is a great city, you will work

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in it. You will see life, colour, things which will excite you. You need excitement. You are pale from overstudy, flabby, *mollis, putidus, ineptus*. Work, out of doors, will improve you. You need it. Come and see me often."

He went over to the boy, embraced him, avoided seeing his tears.

Ben was silent a moment. He realized that his face was wet. He could not look up. Then, "I will do what you say."

Camden nodded approvingly. "You will be glad, take my word." He wrote a few lines. "Give this to your mother. Read evenings. Come in to see me often. Notice everything about you during the day. I expect great things of you."

The boy wiped his face with his sleeve. A moment later he said good-bye in a calm voice.

Once outside the door, he swaggered pompously.

"Where are you going?" asked one of the boys.

"Into the wide, wide world." He spoke flippantly.

"There is nothing more for me to learn here."

His school-mate stared enviously, resentfully. The boaster swaggered down the steps. Other boys asked him where he was going.

"I have exhausted the contents of the library," said the young pedant. "I am now going to add worldly experience to humanistic knowledge."

A boy guffawed. Ben glared at him. At the door he

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kicked the servant into obedience. "Open that door," he screamed. The boys looked on wonderingly. Nonchalantly he sauntered through the doorway into the street. The servant, muttering, slammed the door behind him.

He sobbed, rushed home.

AN hour later his mother watched her husband and her son as they disappeared down the lane. Ben was swaggering ludicrously. She imagined her husband's silent amusement. And Ben's silent contempt, loathing.

Sighing, she re-entered the house. She reread the letter from Camden. It was full of approval, esteem, compliment. A sly feeling of superiority, of her own worth, came over her. Then she despised herself, and, going upstairs, she polished her husband's door so fiercely that it shone even in the dull hallway. Her penance made her arm ache all day.

FOR one year Ben Jonson laid bricks.

Intolerable at first, he soon found it not so bad as he had expected. After all, there was a lot to see. He grew strong, in a clumsy bearlike way. He was not a good



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workman. He looked about too much. There were more fascinating sights in the city than he had ever dreamed of. Did Rome and Athens have this brilliant activity every day, he wondered, this air of something always about to happen?

He soon found that a pedantic manner of speech resulted in jeers, even in bricks. His manner gradually changed from pedantry to a boisterousness marked by an acid wit. This happened quickly. When another workman would have thrown a brick at a tormentor, Ben hurled a stinging epigram, and the other men roared with laughter.

The appreciation of these common people was astonishingly good, he thought. They usually laughed at the right time. He displayed his ability to please them at every opportunity. He became enormously popular among them.

Moving about the city as he did, on various building jobs, he became familiar with the old city, grew to love it. Formerly he had never thought of it. And London became familiar with Ben. More than one wit stopped to bandy words with the clever bricklayer.

One spring morning they were engaged in building the garden wall of Lincoln's Inn. The air was soft, the moist earth in the garden had a languorous fragrance. Jonson was thoroughly attuned.

"*Solvitur acris hiems*," he kept thinking to himself, "*grata vice veris et Favoni*."

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Could Italy be more pleasant than this, he wondered?  
Flocks of white swans glided slowly by on the river.

*"Iam Cytherea chorus ducit Venus, imminente  
Luna."*

Suddenly, in the street before him, a fine lady passed by, unescorted. She was the young countess, Ben recognized, who lived near the inn. He had often seen her before, and she had even smiled at him once, as she walked by and heard the end of one his retorts. Now she smiled again. Catullus flashed into Ben's mind. Impudently, he called to her:

*"Vivamus, mea Lesbia."*

The lady had not yet learned the importance of being earnest. She turned about quickly, laughing. The workmen stared. She said:

*"A line and a trowel  
Guide many a fool:  
Good-morning, sir!"*

One of the workmen guffawed. The lady turned away triumphantly. Ben thought quickly and raised his voice;

*"In silk and scarlet  
Walks many a harlot:  
Good-morning, madam!"*

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Roars of laughter came from the workmen. The lady's face was red and angry. She quickened her steps. Ben raised his voice still louder:

*"Men say y' are fair, and fair ye are, 'tis true;  
But bark! We praise the painter now, not you!"*

The lady began to run, and disappeared round the corner. Passers-by joined in the laughter. One of them stepped up to Ben, who had resumed his trowel.

"You have a quick wit, my lad."

Ben looked up calmly. "I have indeed."

"It was a bit wanton."

Ben grinned.

*"Wantons we are, and though our words be such,  
Our lives do differ from our lines by much."*

The gentleman laughed, and twirled his gold chain thoughtfully. Ben laid a few bricks.

"Do you know any Greek?"

"Εἰ δ' αὖν ἐπ' ἐμπορίην τρέψας,"

replied Ben, slipping a brick neatly into position.

"Ah," said the gentleman, "Homer himself."

"No, sir. Hesiod."

One of the workmen chuckled.

The gentleman smiled and seemed to come to a decision. He beckoned Ben to walk apart with him.

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"My lad, could you talk Greek just as well in Cambridge as in London?"

"Cambridge can teach me nothing at all. But you might go there, and read Hesiod."

The kindly gentleman was hurt. Ben saw that he had gone a bit far. "I must go back to work. I'll meet you at Master Camden's tonight." He ran off.

His would-be benefactor shook his head in perplexity.

"Ask Camden, he knows!" shouted Ben after him.

As he resumed his trowel, one of the bricklayers said to him: "You're an ass. That was old Hoskins, the painter."

"Don't you think I knew it all the time? I'll see him tonight. He didn't even know Hesiod. As for you, close your dirty trap. Such stinkards as you know nothing of the ways of gentlemen, much less scholars." Bricks and epigrams flew all day.

THAT evening Camden was listening to his old friend John Hoskins from Herefordshire, miniature painter to the Court, tell of the rude and witty bricklayer who claimed to know more than all Cambridge.

"His manners were doubtless abominable," said the old scholar, "but I am glad he refused you. Confidentially, he is far more familiar than I with the classics, especially the minor poets. I have great hopes for him. He was getting pretty stale, and his mother and I put

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him to work. That was about a year ago — he is enormously improved now.”

“He will not suffer for lack of confidence,” murmured Hoskins, sadly.

Ben entered.

There were no hopes of his ever becoming beautiful, Camden thought. One eye was a bit lower than the other, the enormous head still seemed glued on to the broad shoulders.

They talked — London, young Marlowe, Chapman, Lyly, Juvenal. Ben read some verses. Hoskins was charmed, Camden pleased.

Hoskins left.

“Sir, do you think I need lay any more bricks?”

“That depends on what you intend to do.”

“Suppose I were to travel.”

“Travel by all means, and leave the bricks behind you.”

“I’m off to Flanders tonight!” cried Ben delightedly. He wrung the old man’s hand and rushed out of the room.

Camden laughed. His young pedant had turned into a robust adventurer.





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## 5

DESPITE the invention of gunpowder the War of Dutch Independence was carried on much as previous conflicts. Great battles were rarely fought, and the opposing armies lay for half a campaign in sight of each other. No Man's Land was Everyman's Land. Here, in the space between the armies, traders from the neighbouring towns set up their markets, and the soldiers would mingle in the temporary shops and taverns. When the air suddenly smelled dangerous to the merchants, they took down their shops and returned to town. The next morning, after much shouting, a mild battle would be fought. After the dead and wounded had been removed, the merchants returned, and friendly intercourse was resumed. This series of alternate battles and festivals continued until, as in a game of slap jack, one army was entirely *épuisé*. This was celebrated as a great victory, and changed the map of Europe.

The officers of the hostile armies did not mix on the common ground. Rather, they entertained each other cordially in their camps.

Such was the common military etiquette.

The only thing that might interrupt the feasts was the dense and odorous smoke from the cannons, which were always going off unexpectedly. On such an oc-

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casion the embarrassed hosts would apologize profusely and their guests would return hastily home, for the smoke was horrible out of all proportion to the size of the guns. After a battle the atmosphere was impossible, and the officers had recourse to their bottles of scent. The men prayed for a wind-storm.

Let us look through a rift in the smoke.

It is late October, and the English are about to prepare to abandon camp and retire into winter quarters. There has been no fighting for over a month. The tradesmen have removed their tents, for it is getting cold. The men are bored and restless. Over the camp lies a smothering odour of brimstone. A cannon has just exploded, as a soldier lay down upon it to take a nap. Inside their tents the officers sit about listlessly, scent-bottles in hand.

Suddenly a trumpet sounds, out in the field. The officers rush from their tents.

A Spanish trumpeter is walking slowly across the field in the direction of the English camp. The officers and men gather in excited groups. Something is going to happen at last.

The Spaniard comes nearer. He is dressed beautifully in yellow and tan. His boots shine. From the trumpet hangs the red and yellow flag. He blows long Spanish blasts. Finally he stops, bows very low, and makes a

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short speech in quick Spanish. He stops, evidently awaiting an answer.

"Taken!" calls a loud voice from among the Englishmen.

The Spaniard looks politely blank.

"*Acceptum!*" shouts the voice.

With a smile the trumpeter makes a low bow and walks quickly back towards his camp.

The English army bursts into an uproar. What has the man said? No one seems to have understood the Spanish. And who has answered him? Only Lord Vere seems to know, and he is laughing so hard he cannot talk. But no. There is Ben Jonson in the middle of an excited group, evidently explaining. Everyone rushes over to him, and he is soon addressing the whole camp. The trumpeter had brought a challenge from a Spanish cavalier, he was saying. If any hero in the English army would fight a single combat for the sake of his mistress, the noble Marques Juan de Sanguemaldo would meet him in the middle of the field. And Ben had accepted for himself.

The soldiers roared with laughter. Ben looked so ridiculous, so unmartial. His year in the Low Countries had made him more ugly than ever. He never shaved, and had grown enormous, carrot-coloured side whiskers. They seemed all the more comical, since no hair ever grew on his chin.

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The noble Marques expected to fight with a cavalier, not a bricklayer, the men said.

"Who is your mistress?" called one of the soldiers, and a roar of laughter followed.

Ben had been expecting that question. There really was no mistress. In London he had been too busy to bother with any. In Flanders —— But quickly he assumed a tender expression, ludicrously romantic. He cried rapturously:

*"Lucy, you brightness of our sphere, who are  
Life of the Muses' day, their morning star!"* . .

"To Lucy!" shouted a soldier, flourishing his sword.

"To Lucy!" shouted everyone, and the camp echoed with the shout.

"Ay, to Lucy!" breathed Ben foolishly, still wearing his moonish expression. He grinned, in spite of himself.

Lord Vere shrieked with laughter, and Ben rushed off to make himself ready for the fray.

BEHOLD that noble Castilian, Juan Felip Salvador Calmatore y Mirabel, Marques de Sanguemaldo.

His confessor had blessed him, as he set out with only one retainer, to assert the honour of the charming Ysabel, who was happily married in Madrid. The Marques cut a noble figure on his horse. His armour shone

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like glass, and red plumes waved from his helmet. The retainer carried a spear, two swords, a battle-ax, a bugle. Slowly they rode to the middle of the field. The retainer blew three solemn blasts.

A figure left the English lines and approached them, followed by another. Both were on foot.

"Santa Maria," murmured the Marques, as the figures drew nearer. What might this thing be? The first figure was short and enormously broad. It walked slowly, covered as it was from head to foot with heavy and rusted armour. There was a suggestion of a swagger in the ponderous gait.

Was this the way a noble Englishman entered battle? Suddenly the noble Englishman stumbled and fell, with a clatter of his garments. Cheers arose from the English camp. The Marques was puzzled. The English soldiers seemed to be shouting "Lusi! Lusi! "

Several soldiers ran out into the field and picked up their champion. Carefully he approached the Marques, and bowed, flourishing an enormous sword.

The Marques dismounted; he bowed. "*La hermosa Ysabel*," he said, proudly.

"*Lusi*," the English knight seemed to reply.

The combat began.

For ten minutes the nimble Marques de Sanguemaldo danced lightly about his massive opponent, landing thrust after thrust all over his anatomy. The rusty fig-



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ure merely veered about phlegmatically, like a heavy weather-vane.

Suddenly the English knight grasped his sword with both hands. He raised it with difficulty, high into the air, and, veering about, let it fall with its own momentum upon the waving plumes of the Marques. The red feathers fell to the ground. The Marques was no more.

Ben motioned to his second, who proceeded to strip the fallen flower of his accoutrements. Soon he was laden with armour, helmet, weapons. The Spanish servant raised the body of his master and withdrew.

Slowly Ben returned towards the camp. The entire company rushed out to meet him. Four of them lifted the perspiring conqueror on their shoulders, staggering beneath the enormous weight of Ben and the armour. Cheer after cheer arose. Lucy's name was wafted to the skies. No one could quite realize that Ben was a hero, but everyone cheered just the same.

After emerging from his iron shell, Ben swaggered up and down, bowing to the right and left. His enormous head wagged importantly. The soldiers demanded a speech. Ben needed no urging, but he was weary. He made it very brief. He raised his hand for silence:

"*Love,*" he said pompously, "*is a kind of war; hence those who fear!*"

*No cowards must his royal ensigns bear!"*

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Cheer after cheer rolled from the soldiers. "To Ben! Big Ben! To Ben Jonson! To Lucy!" The camp was in an uproar.

Ben almost decided to speak some more. The applause was as music to his ears. But he was weary, and slipped into his tent. The soldiers crowded in after him, laughing, congratulating. A lion at last! Ben swelled with pleasure. He had done a noble and a classical deed. He had killed his opponent in single combat and had taken the *opima spolia* from him. Æschylus had fought at Salamis! Horace had *run away* at Philippi! But Ben Jonson was greater than either. He was a Cæsar and his own Virgil.

The next morning the camp broke up and the company marched to Zutphen.

But Ben had had his great triumph, and decided to return to London. He set out with the Earl of Southampton, whom he now called Harry.

"Too bad," thought Ben, "that there is no Lucy. She would be a fortunate mistress."

As soon as he got to London, he looked about for an actual, flesh-and-blood Lucy. The girl he saw most often was the daughter of the host of the Moon Tavern, and he was much taken by the tender manner in which she served him wine. Indeed, she never allowed his tankard to be empty. One day she was so assiduous in her attentions that Ben's consequent eloquence

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overpowered her, and amidst loud and boisterous jests Jane Ashton became Mistress Benjamin Jonson.

For Ben's convenience they lived at the tavern, and he set out to find some work. Jane had a very loud tongue indeed, as Ben soon discovered, but she was a soft-hearted creature just the same, and there were times when she wished she had waited for a more romantic lover.



### 6

OLD PHILIP HENSLOWE had literary and executive offices in the Rose Playhouse. Here a dozen young men fixed up old plays for him, brought them up to date, wrote new ones. And to the theatre came dozens of other young men hoping for parts in the plays.

One morning, as Henslowe rushed frantically about, ordering, scolding, chattering, a short and ugly-faced young man suddenly stood before him.

Henslowe looked at him quickly and shook his head testily. "Don't bother to speak to me, sir," he squeaked; "I don't know who you are, but you won't do, you won't do, you won't do. With those hands you ain't a writer, and with that face you ain't a player. Your face looks like a rotten russet apple when it is bruised. Your mouth is terrible, terrible. You won't

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do, get out of my way, get out of my way! ” The old man hurried on.

The young man laughed. “ Say, old man, couldn’t I play a bloody good murderer? ”

Henslowe hesitated, and turned round. “ Fat, too fat,” he muttered, but his jaw dropped slowly and he examined the young man with beady eyes. “ We always need murderers,” he rattled, “ fat murderers not often, thin murderers usually, what’s the difference? Turn round. Close your eyes. Open your mouth. Make a face. Grin as if you had just stabbed your father. Wider, wider. Say: ‘ Die, wretch! ’ Stop.” The old man made a trumpet of his hands and screeched. “ George Chapman! George! Take care of this new murderer! ” He nodded jerkily to his new assassin and hastened off.

In five minutes Ben Jonson had become an actor, and the next spring, a few months after his military exploits, he was wandering through the Cambridgeshire country-side with a troupe of Henslowe’s strolling players, walking with their wagon from market town to market town, from village green to village green. The life was delicious. There was no program, no definite schedule, and the players walked as they wished, between endless rows of softly blooming fruit-trees.

If the town in which they arrived boasted an inn, the actors boisterously took possession of its octagonal courtyard, set some wide boards up on a few barrel-

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heads, tooted their trumpets in every corner of the village, and gave their play. Their dressing-rooms were usually in the stable, and the inn-yard was packed with the rustic rabble, while the country aristocracy sat in the galleries which opened out from the upstairs bedrooms.

Owing to his ferocious and uncouth appearance, Ben Jonson was invariably a murderer or a devil. And indeed he soon discovered that this afforded him more publicity than almost anyone else in the show. For at a crucial moment in the play, when the audience was awaiting with great tension the appearance of the devil through the floor, or of the murderer through a secret panel, the manager always stopped the play and passed the basket. If the collection was large, he promised, the devil or the murderer would appear with alacrity—otherwise he would regretfully have to stop the show at once.

And so, after the money had been counted, and the naïve rustic audience rendered nearly hysterical with eagerness, Ben, clad in flaming red robes, would shoot dazzlingly up through a trap-door, uttering a weird diabolical groan; or would, with bared teeth and a shining dagger, slowly emerge from the gloom of the back-stage.

The crowd always became wild with delight, and greeted the corpulent fiend with appreciative cheers or with pious groans and hisses. The piety of a rustic



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audience was one of the things a stage devil had to reckon with, for turnips and cabbages were considered but his due reward, and at times the enthusiastically virtuous peasants expressed themselves with sticks and stones.

If there was no inn in the town, the show was given on the village green, or in the schoolhouse, or even in the church. And sometimes they pitched their play-wagon on the public highway.

For half a year Ben travelled about England as a devil and a murderer. One day old Henslowe, looking over some of the actors' manuscripts of the plays, discovered that Ben had been constantly at work touching up most of the plays in the repertory, striking out old scenes and adding new ones, usually scenes devoted to assassins and fiends. The old man was only too quick to make use of any talent which was not excessive in price, and since Ben's acting was not especially good (the other players were very definite on this point), Henslowe transferred him to London. Here, instead of playing the devil three or four hours a day, Ben rewrote and mended hundreds of old plays, acting only occasionally.

Jane was glad to see Ben again, and a few weeks after his return a daughter was born to them. They called her Maria, and when she died, six months later, Jane minded it very much. She became very tart with the customers in the tavern and cried all night long. Ben

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wrote a charming epitaph on the little girl, not forgetting to mention most tenderly her mother's tears. But Ben conquered his sorrow by convivial evenings with his theatrical friends.

He drank a good deal, and one day he lunged cheerfully off a dock into the river. But Ben did not sink, and, to the accompaniment of great cheering, a friend drew him to shore with the rope the lady's midnight lover had used in the play two hours before.



### 7.

A YEAR passes.

The Thames is covered with swans. The whole river is white with them. They make delicious sounds, and look like blocks of snow.

On the bank of the river is a new theatre. It looks like a little fortress, but more brilliant, with its twelve yellow sides and bright red roof. A little blue door leads into it, and above the door swings a sign, with a swan painted on it. On top of the building is a little turret, and on the turret an ashen flagpole. From the flagpole waved a great red banner with a white swan on it.

The banner means that a play is going on. Frequent cheers sound from the building.

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Suddenly a great confused roar breaks out. The play-house shakes.

The little blue door is thrown open. A man rushes out, dashes to the river, jumps into a boat, and rows hastily off. The blue door opens again. Men rush after the first, but he is already half-way across the river. His pursuers shout and shake their fists. They jump into a boat and row after him, but he has already landed on the opposite bank. He runs up the stairs and disappears in London.

The man who is fleeing is Thomas Nashe. It is his play which has been interrupted during its first performance at the Swan. It is called *The Isle of Dogs*, and pleased the people, who cheered so loudly. But it laughed derisively at the city officials. Some were in the audience. They broke up the performance, and the author is fleeing for his life.

Most of the actors flee too. The audience jeers the city fathers. Three actors are caught and handcuffed. They are hastily rowed across the river and thrown into the Marshalsea.

Officials pursue Nashe, but he has disappeared. They search his lodging and confiscate his private papers. The rest of the company has hurried into the country. They go with such speed that in a week they are acting in Bristol. The Swan is padlocked. Another lewd playhouse shut up, say the officials piously. It is their favourite pastime.

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THE three actors languish in their prison cell. They await trial for sedition, slander, and mutiny.

The prison stinks. Gabriel Spenser, one of the actors, wrinkles his handsome nose and makes expressive sounds. He sits in a corner, playing solitaire. His green cloak is dirty, and his goatee has become a straggly beard.

Robert Shaw sits on the wooden bed in deep gloom. He spits on his hands and wipes them on the seat of his breeches. He pumice-stones his beard carefully. He looks almost as fresh as the moment he was seized. But his gloom is impenetrable.

Ben Jonson is the third prisoner. His penalty will be worse than that of the other two, for he helped Nashe to write the play. Now he is busy writing another one. The jailer passes by. Spenser hurriedly sits on his cards. Ben sits on his play and seems to swallow his pencil. Shaw stares gloomily at the jailer, who disappears. Business is resumed.

Ben looks horrible. His clothes are filthy, and his red hair is matted darkly with dirt. His huge head nods, trying to keep time with his metre. It nods irregularly. He reads a scene aloud. "Stinking," says Spenser contemptuously. "It's nothing but dull small talk."

Ben flushes, and snorts testily. "Small talk? *You* talk as if your brain were taken with the palsy. You cackle like a goose."

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Spenser laughs. "You don't expect anyone to act that, do you?"

"Not you, nor any other third-rate juggler," retorts Ben loudly.

"Silence!" screams the jailer.

"That's what the audience will say, too," says Spenser, half aloud.

But Ben is already back in his play. Spenser sniffs the foul air and plays solitaire desperately. Shaw polishes his nails on the lining of his coat.

They have been in prison three weeks.

They stay there three more.

One day the jailer comes with a paper. It is a pardon. They are released. No one knows why.

Outside the prison they meet Nashe. He has been pardoned too. He said that he wrote only the first act of the play, and that Ben wrote the rest. The jailer had told Ben this.

Ben goes up to Nashe, who holds out his hand. Nashe beams good-fellowship. "Welcome, my dear fellows." Ben raises his big arm. He lowers it quickly, and Nashe lies in a mud puddle. He staggers to his feet. Spenser pushes him back. Shaw kicks him. He groans. The three actors walk quickly away.

A MONTH passes.

The Rose Playhouse is larger than the Swan. It stands on the bankside, in an old rose-garden, and its flag



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bears a red rose on a white ground. The heart of the rose is golden. But no flag is flying in the morning. Performances start at four.

"For the Playeres Onelie," says a little door under the winding stairway outside.

Philip Henslowe is sitting on the door-step, writing in his diary. The old man scratches carefully. "To Mr. Chapman, for three acts of a tragedy, seven pounds," he writes. That had been a good play. Brought in over fifty pounds clear. "Lent to Benjamin Jonson, in advance on a comedy, twenty shillings." The old man sighs. Twenty shillings! Ben had got drunk on it. "Oh dear," sighs the old man, "twenty shillings! Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!"

Henslowe peers over his spectacles. Gabriel Spenser is coming up the path. He is the handsomest actor in London. Whenever he plays, the house is filled with women. Henslowe loves him. How beautiful he is! How valuable! He wears a brilliant green cloak, and a hat with yellow plumes. The old man embraces him. He must keep Gabriel by all means.

Gabriel demands some money. Henslowe whines; Gabriel insists. The new theatre across the street would be only too glad to hire him, he says. He pockets the money and goes off. Henslowe sighs, and hopes he will be sober for the day's performance. But he fears that he will not be. Ben Jonson is the only other actor available, and he will have to play Gabriel's part, and

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everyone will laugh and throw vegetables. Some will hiss and demand their money back. "Oh dear," sighs the old man, "how discouraging! Oh dear, oh dear me! "

THE theatre is full. Three galleries full of ladies wait for Gabriel Spenser.

Henslowe rushes about excitedly. Spenser is nowhere to be found. Ben Jonson must take his place. But neither is Ben to be found. No one can do anything.

The audience grows impatient, calls, whistles.

Tremblingly the old man comes out on the stage. Whiningly he begs the indulgence of the audience — the actors are indisposed — the next day, if the audience would be so kind as to return . . .

Catcalls and hisses fill the air. Every farthing has to be returned. The old man weeps. "Oh dear," he sobs, "oh dear, oh dear! "

WHILE Henslowe weeps, Spenser sits in the Angel Tavern, drunk. He reeks with the smell of ale. Across the table sprawls Ben Jonson. He too is drunk.

They have been boisterous all afternoon. They have been roaring out drunken songs. They have wept drunken tears of eternal friendship. Now they are becoming quarrelsome.

They talk angrily. Spenser tries to rise, but Ben reaches over and pushes him back into his seat.

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The landlord seems anxious. He knows from experience that when two drunken actors quarrel over a bill, it is seldom paid.

They shout at each other.

Ben raises his pewter cup high in the air. Spenser mutters thickly and reaches for it. It comes down heavily upon his head. He groans and falls backward. People rush up to him. Ben staggers out and home. He falls into a heavy sleep.

Ben wakes up in a hot sweat. Dimly he recalls what has happened.

Later in the day a note is brought in to him.

The next morning before dawn he sets out and wakes his friend George Chapman. Together they walk through the still city and out into the fields in Shore-ditch.

There Spenser is waiting.

Not a word is spoken. They fight.

Spenser assumes a graceful position.

Ben's rapier plunges through his heart and the point comes out through the back.

Chapman sighs with relief.

Ben wipes his sword on the dead man's coat. "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*," he cries, waving his sword. Spenser's second drags off his dead friend.

Arm in arm Ben and Chapman swagger down to the river and are rowed toward the city. At a tavern Ben orders ale in a loud voice. He hugs the serving-girl,

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like a big bear. She screams; his face is bloody. Spenser had given him a gash across a cheek.

Ben sits at a table drinking, and telling other drinkers of his prowess. Soon he is hopelessly drunk. He stands on a table and tries to recite a Latin ode. He becomes sick and falls to the floor. Chapman picks him up, leans him on his shoulder, and guides him through the streets.

A sheriff is waiting for them. In his hand he holds a warrant. The duel has been discovered. Chapman tries argument, money. Both fail. The sheriff summons an assistant. Together they carry away Ben, who mumbles helplessly. They shut the gate of Newgate Prison in Chapman's face. They dump Ben into a small and dirty cell. Chapman thinks quickly.



### 8

CHAPMAN hurries to Ben's lodging, breaks open a window, and lets himself in. He rummages about on a table covered with papers, seizes a bundle of closely written sheets, hurries out.

Quickly he walks down to the river, calls for a boat, and is rowed across to Southwark.

He jumps to shore and hurries through the alleys. He arrives at a tall, octagonal barn. It is the Globe The-

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atre. He enters, makes his way along a dark corridor, knocks at a narrow door and opens it.

A handsome, trim-looking little man is sitting at a small table, arranging pieces of money in little piles. He handles the gold caressingly. A look of smug content is on his mild face. As Chapman enters, he puts down the money regretfully and rises. Chapman notices that his stomach is beginning to bulge.

"My dear George, how are you?" The little man talks with a slight affectation. It is his stage voice, which slips in unconsciously.

Chapman looks enviously at the money. "Will," he says, "is that all yours?"

The man nods prosperously. "All from one play," he says, patting his embroidered vest. Then, gushingly: "Oh, George, I'm going to buy the most divine old house! The second largest house in Stratford — New Place, they call it — over a hundred years old. Ever since I was a child I've longed for it and now I have a chance to get it. It has two huge barns and two adorable gardens — simply *full* of roses and larkspurs. Anne is in love with the place. We're going to put in a big fruit-orchard and currants and berries, and start roses growing up the house. The parlour of the old place is a gem — two long rows of casements, and the most enormous fireplace I ever saw in my life." He pauses for breath, then gushes on. "Anne can't wait till we get it — think of being able to spend one's old



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age in such a heavenly place! Stratford is such a lovely old town, the river is so peaceful and silvery — some day you must come up to see us.” He smiles beatifically and sighs with ecstasy.

Chapman masks his envy with boredom. The stream of sentimentalities had surprised him, for although Will Shakspeare talked more than any other man in London, it was but seldom that he spoke of himself.

“ Really, Will,” he says, “ you’re too much of a gentleman to amount to much as a writer. You look like the Lord Mayor in that waistcoat.”

Shakspeare smiles smoothly and strokes his silky, pointed little beard. Chapman presses the bundle of Ben’s manuscript upon him, and he takes it absent-mindedly, promising to read it.

Before Chapman is out of the room, Shakspeare is counting his money again.

But a few hours later Chapman is surprised to find several gold-pieces in his pocket.

PLOTS against the life of Elizabeth abound. Several Roman priests are convicted of attempting to poison her, and are beheaded. Spies are thick in England, for the Queen is fearful.

But many priests succeed in disguising themselves as tradesmen, and prowl about secretly. Elizabeth is a murderess, an arch-heretic.

The priests visit the sick in hospitals, posing as rela-

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tives, exhorting the helpless patients to the true Church. Everywhere they seek for converts. They hear the confessions of the faithful. They gain entrance to the prisons. Frequently they are murdered by spies.

BEN has been sitting in his cell in Newgate for several weeks. He looks forward to the gallows.

Rats poke their heads up through holes in the floor.

"My son!" A piercing whisper transfixes him. He looks round. On the outside of the bars stands a black figure, barely visible in the gloom of the prison. Gradually it clears. A grey face looms out of the darkness. The shadow whispers passionately.

"I have come to lead you back into the fold."

"Ah," thought Ben, "a Papist." He waited.

"As you swing on the gallows, you will be at peace with God."

Ben shuddered.

"Ah, you shudder." The shadow whispered almost screamingly. "Think of the terrible rope! Think of dangling above the ground, think of the crunch of your neck as it breaks! Think of dropping into the flames of hell!"

Ben screamed. The shadow at once disappeared, noiselessly.

Another, taller, shadow appeared at the door. "What's up?"

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"A rat," said Ben.

The spy hurried away, and hunted through the prison in vain.

The next day the shadow came again. It denounced Luther as a fiend from hell. It divulged the mysteries of the Incarnation and the transubstantiation. It proclaimed the glory of the Holy Trinity, the omniscience of the Holy Father.

Ben listened greedily. He was awed. Why should he not enter the old Church, the fount of wisdom throughout the ages, the preserver of the great books? The priest came every day. He talked of the miracles of Saint Anicetus, of the eighteen martyrs of Saragossa. He proved Virgil a Roman Catholic. He argued with Ben in Latin as to the spirituality of some of the popes. He did it well.

Ben summoned up images of the empyrean, with himself assisting at the sacrifice of the mass. He imagined himself flying gracefully through the spheres, leading up to salvation the aged spirit of his beloved Camden. One day the priest brought a little bottle. "Holy water from Mount Calvary," he whispered reverently. His voice became shrill. "Let me baptize thee! This is the day of days, the anniversary of the beheading of St. John the Baptist! Bow thy head in submission!" He went into Latin. Ben knelt down beside the door. Reaching in through the bars, the priest broke the bottle over Ben's filthy head, mumbling a formula.

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"Rejoice!" he cried. "The flames of hell shall not reach thee!" He disappeared, never to return. His task was ended.

Ben arose thoughtfully. Already he began to doubt the efficacy of his conversion. For the water which trickled down over his nose into his mouth tasted salty and fishy, exactly like that in the Thames.

THE days dragged by. Finally they shaved him and washed him and brought him before the Court.

There Chapman ran up to him. "Will Shakspeare has taken your play," he said; "he's crazy for it."

Ben laughed. "Much good it will do me."

Chapman whispered something to him. Ben nodded his head. There seemed to be hope in that, for Shakspeare was in the room waiting for him. Couldn't Shakspeare do something? Ben wondered. He was a rather well-known person. Chapman laughed. "If the magistrate knew that we were players, out we'd go, into the street. You must do what I told you."

A man on a platform called for order and droned out a long complaint. Ben could catch only parts of it — something about a rapier . . . Gabriel Spenser . . . feloniously and wilfully killed and slew. . . . He dragged to a close.

Another man arose. "Do you confess the indictment?" he asked. Chapman nodded to Ben. "I do," said Ben.

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The magistrate rapped on a table. Had the accused anything to say?

Ben rose. "I can read Latin."

The Court seemed disappointed, but doubtful. "Can you read your neck verse? Can you convince Her Majesty's Court that you are an educated person, a scholar, worthy the protection of the State?"

Chapman looked at Ben and smiled. Ben at once began to recite in a loud voice:

"*Hora novissima, tempora pessima sunt; vigilemus.*

"*Ecce minaciter imminet arbiter Ille supremus —*"

Chapman listened in amazement. He knew nothing of Ben's conversion, although he himself was secretly a Catholic. Had Ben too joined the Church, he wondered?

"*Imminet, imminet, ut mala terminet, æqua coronet. . . .*"

An official interrupted. The Latin must be read, not recited, he objected. They brought out an old Tacitus. Ben felt quite secure, and grinned over at Shakspeare. They pointed out a passage. Ben read along easily.

"*Tertius expeditionum annus novas gentes . . .*"

The magistrate rapped. "That will do." Ben was free. No, it seemed that one thing must still be done — a



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little mark, a brand, must be made upon the prisoner, in case any future necessity ——

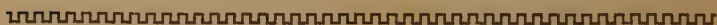
A fire in a little can was brought into the room, an iron placed in it. Two jailers held Ben's arm. One pressed his left thumb against the iron. Ben screamed. Chapman and Shakspeare leaned forward in their seats. Shakspeare turned his head away. An odour of burned flesh filled the room.

Ben was free. He joined his friends. "Of course," reminded the judge, "you know that you forfeit your property." Ben laughed. Chapman laughed too. He had visited Ben's lodging the day before, and it was stripped clean. Evidently the broken window had attracted more than one fog-prowler.

The three men walked out of the court. The pain in Ben's hand made him shudder. He looked at his thumb. It was swollen fiery red, and in the middle of it was a dark-brown T. "What is the T for?" he asked Chapman.

Chapman looked at him and put his arm in his. "For Tyburn, where the gallows are," he said.

With Shakspeare gushing sympathetically on one side and Chapman murmuring thanksgivings on the other, Ben walked to the Globe and watched them rehearse his play.



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### 9

It is an autumn afternoon in 1598, and groups of Londoners make their way down to the river. "Southward ho!" they cry, and little row-boats dash up and take them across the Thames to Paris Garden Stairs. The yellow flag over the Globe waves invitingly, and everyone makes his way to the theatre. A bruiser at the door takes in the pennies. To the right of the dark hallway is the entrance to the pit, where one sits on benches or on the floor, and runs the risk of being trampled to death. The more fastidious pay another penny to a man in a red cloak, who stands at the bottom of a flight of stairs. These lead to the galleries, which are divided into "rooms" and furnished with straw chairs.

Two galleries run around the inside of the building and look down upon the stage, which projects into the pit. There is no roof over the pit, and the yellow flag flaps noisily above the tradesmen and pickpockets. Only the stage and the galleries are sheltered from the weather by a narrow roof of thatch. Wooden pillars, painted to imitate marble, and carved with masks and satyrs' heads, support the galleries. A green curtain hangs across the stage.

The pit is almost full. Everyone is talking in a loud voice. Shakspeare himself is to act this afternoon in a

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new comedy, the scene of which is laid in Rome. "Not Rome," says someone, authoritatively, "but London," and someone else has heard that Venice is the place. Does anyone know whose play it is? Some new person has written it, some shopkeeper or something, whom Shakspeare has picked up. An uproar arises near the entrance. A pickpocket has been discovered, and is being mauled by the crowd. "Thief! Thief! Cutpurse!" Everyone shrieks at him and kicks him.

Up in the galleries the conversation is less boisterous. Several ladies are up there, beautifully dressed and masked, for a public playhouse is not quite respectable. Young men in lace and velvet sit by them, and they buzz affectionately.

Hawkers of gingerbread and pears offer their wares in loud raucous cries, tossing pieces of cake and fruit up into the galleries and catching the pennies.

A bugle blows, but no one pays any attention to it. A second blast is heard. The conversation continues loudly. A third blast is blown, long and loud. The noise lessens somewhat, but a buzz continues.

A handsome actor, crowned with a wreath of bay leaves, steps in front of the curtain. He holds up a placard bearing the title of the play — "Every Man in His Humour," it says. He speaks the prologue, and everyone begins to listen. This will be a comedy of modern London, he says. No silly romance, no super-

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natural events, no battles. He hopes the audience will be kind. He bows and withdraws.

The audience seems disappointed. They talk loudly again. No shipwrecks, no battles, no love-making? They shan't be backward about demanding their money.

Suddenly the curtain is pulled back and the play begins.

THE behaviour of the audience that afternoon was slightly out of the ordinary. Since the play is a comedy, they laugh. But the laughter does not come as usual, in boisterous roaring gusts. It is less raucous, but continuous. Almost every line that the actors speak contains some London expression that everyone has used since childhood. The expressions are satirized. They seem ridiculous. Everyone in the audience laughs at himself and thinks he laughs at his friends.

The young rakes, who always come in late, and who usually create a disturbance by dragging their stools up on to the stage itself, feel this afternoon that their actions would be unpopular, and sit down as quietly as possible in the rear. The gingerbread-sellers forget to shout out their bargains. The engrossed audience is a splendid harvest for the pickpockets.

As the curtain is drawn after each act, the applause is tremendous, and after Shakspeare has spoken the epilogue, the pit bursts into loud cheers.

## O RARE BEN JONSON

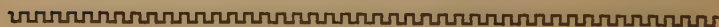
Shakspeare leads out Ben, who struts and bows absurdly. As he makes a graceful exit backwards, he knocks over a chair. The audience redoubles its cheers. He comes forward again, alone, bows right and left.

v He is glad he took Shakspeare's advice and changed the action of the play from Italy to England. He bows again, the curtain is drawn, the house empties.

The play runs for five evenings, everyone in London sees it, people talk of nothing else. Old Camden sees it three times, beside himself with delight. Five times the the old man hobbles across London Bridge, pushing through the crowds between the shops. The last night he is so weary from laughter that he has to be carried home in a boat.

The players are ordered to give the show at Court. Ben kisses the Queen's hand. He is careful to keep his left thumb hidden. Overnight he has become the rage of the town.

ON the proceeds from Ben's play the Jonsons moved from the tavern to comfortable apartments in an old house by the river. But Ben was not at home very often, and when he was at home, he was usually writing or snoring. Jane looked out the window and watched the crowds of boats on the river.





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### IO

OLD HENSLOWE had wept bitter tears at Gabriel Spenser's death. He prayed that the murderer of his beloved actor might swing on the gallows. When Ben not only escaped hanging, but became, overnight, one of the most famous men in London, the old man tore his hair.

So did some of his starving young hack writers, with whom Ben used to piece out plays.

John Marston, for instance, was a twenty-four-year-old Oxford graduate who had achieved publicity during his college days as the writer of erotic verse. On the strength of this reputation he had drifted to London and begun working for Henslowe at so much a line. Here he came into contact with Jonson. The explosion was loud.

Marston was childishly vain, affected, voluptuous, effeminate. His insatiable thirst for distinction made him unreal and untrustworthy. He lisped and simpered.

Such a person irritated Ben's rocky masculinity. Their frequent quarrels brought tears to Henslowe's eyes. Ben had once spanked Marston in public and wrenched a pistol from him.

When Ben suddenly rose to fame, Marston turned green. And when the Queen herself condescended to

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visit a public playhouse, to be present at the opening of Ben's second play, he wept with envy. He fairly danced from rage. He wrote a flat play in which Ben was portrayed as a frequenter of brothels. But no one recognized the portrait. Only Ben realized that it was meant for him, and waited.

✓ Another of Henslowe's workmen was Thomas Dekker, a young fellow just out of his teens. He turned up in London from no one knew where, with only a patchy education and a ready wit. He was thriftless, Bohemian, always in debt; and would write anything at all for money. Several years he spent in debtors' prison. He had always got along well enough with Ben when they were writing plays together, but Ben's dazzling success presented an inviting target for Dekker's gay satire. He could not resist the opportunity, and wrote an amusing, irresponsible comedy in which Ben figured as a provincial actor, with a "mountain belly and a rocky face." This drama had some success, and small boys pointed laughingly at Ben on the street. And then three or four of Henslowe's lesser men banded together and produced a comedy which ridiculed Ben's pedantry and conceit.

Old Henslowe was delighted with these thrusts against Gabriel's murderer. But Ben, supremely confident in his fame, ignored them. He was very much satisfied with himself, and busy on a third play.

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AFTER the gloomy execution of Mary Stuart, in 1537, the Court at Whitehall, which had been brilliant and boisterous, became a bit dull. Elizabeth herself passed sleepless nights, lost her vivacious spirits, became fretful and morose.

Mary's ghost, dignified and beautiful, hovered over Whitehall.

The courtiers could no longer be carelessly gay. Their manners became formal and fantastic. They exchanged their overflowing English gaiety for apish affectations and refinements.

And when the memory of Mary's murder gradually faded out, the grimacing antics of the new etiquette remained.

At these fopperies Ben Jonson aimed *Cynthia's Revels*. There are in this play "Four Foolish Courtiers," who are conceited, voluptuous, stupid, and absurd. They are matched by "Four Foolish Ladies," gossipy and malicious. There are also many minor shady gallants, and some seedy and affected men of letters, who wander in and out of the plot, and aroused the wrath of Henslowe's younger men. Indeed, the whole play was so excellently pointed that everyone at court considered himself or herself one of the characters. Ben also put "Four Virtuous Ladies" into the play, and these places were soon claimed many times over by confident maids of honour. Cynthia herself was a pattern

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of virtue and justice, and was one of the greatest compliments the old queen ever received.

Queen Elizabeth was also much pleased to find Ben defending her treatment of the Earl of Essex, but a good many members of the aristocracy of England began to be a bit less enthusiastic for this new playwright who dared satirize persons of condition.

But Ben was not a man to overcome prejudice with conciliatory manners. Each of his three plays showed an increasing conceit, a more contemptuous disdain for those whose opinions differed from his own. *Cynthia's Revels* closed with the line:

"By God 'tis good, and if you like 't, you may."

The Queen slapped her thigh at that, but some of her courtiers were not so pleased.

The London populace, on the other hand, took great delight in seeing the follies of their betters exposed, and the play was a great popular success.

The indignation at Henslowe's establishment was intense. Ben's plays were drawing all the audiences, and the old man's income was dwindling. He was in a mood for a struggle. Marston's envy grew stronger and stronger. He read himself into the character of one of the voluptuous revellers in *Cynthia's Revels*. He came to believe that Jonson had attacked him in this guise. Henslowe inflamed his childish fury. Together they called in the services of Dekker.

No one could write more vigorously and insultingly

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that this careless, charming scapegrace. Henslowe paid them to concoct a play which would damage the reputation of Jonson irremediably. They at once set to work on a comedy ridiculing Jonson's pedantic mannerisms, his conceited behaviour, his bricklaying origin, his warts.

The work was barely begun when Ben caught wind of it.

Instead of awaiting the attack, he at once set to work. In fifteen weeks, before his enemies were ready, he had completed a satirical drama, full of the most crushing and savage invective. Under the thin veil of a Roman setting he portrayed Marston and Dekker as two vicious characters. Marston is covered with biting insults. His effeminacy, his voluptuousness, his frail physique, his vanity, are brought forward so clearly that no one could mistake the allusion. He is shown a pander, a conspirator. Dekker is a simple fellow, willing to undertake any sort of vice for anyone who will pay him, writing slanderous letters for pay, an habitué of vicious circles, dressed in filthy rags. The personal applications were unmistakable. The public flocked to the playhouse to see this stinging and furious attack on two well-known players. *The Poetaster* duplicated the success of *Every Man in his Humour*.

Marston and Dekker were absolutely routed. They dared not appear on the streets. Henslowe dared not visit them, lest he and they be dragged out by the



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populace for public amusement. When, a few weeks later, their play was given, it failed miserably. Although as good a play as Ben's own, it assumed the position of a mere reply. For many weeks the two men slunk about under cover.

Ben did not even deign to answer their weak reply. When *The Poetaster* was published in book form, he announced in the preface his determination to abandon comedy for a form of drama less easily converted into an arena for vulgar battles.



### II

BEN JONSON was sitting with Chapman watching the first performance of Shakspeare's *Julius Cæsar*. As the curtain went down on Cassius and Casca plotting darkly during the thunder-storm, the audience had applauded vigorously. But Ben sniffed. Shakspeare's Romans were too Elizabethan.

Now the conspirators were gathering in Brutus' orchard. They whispered and argued. The audience grew tense with interest.

Suddenly the clock struck three. Ben could scarcely believe his ears. A clock, in Cæsar's day! This was horse-play. But he seemed to be the only one to notice it. The audience took it as a matter of course; even

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Chapman saw no reason why Brutus shouldn't have a clock if he wanted to.

Ben sat through the rest of the play in agony. A clock in old Rome! Shakspeare was an ignorant ass.

About this time, indeed, everyone was writing Roman tragedies.

John Marston wrote one, which Ben went to see. Here too he was deeply pained, for the old Roman soldier flourished a very Elizabethan pistol.

Clearly, his friends were fooling the public. Nobly, he decided to dedicate himself to the great work of educating the London populace concerning the social conditions of ancient Rome.

He became moody. He buried himself more deeply than ever in his classical studies. He raged if he was interrupted.

BEN was not a companionable person at home. His wife he wanted always near at hand, but he seldom concerned himself with entertaining her. Jane was lonely in the silent house, and regretted leaving the noise and good cheer of the tavern. She dared go out but little, for Ben enforced obedience.

So when her son was born, at the end of a cold and cheerless winter, she spent her whole time in adoring him. She trembled, the few times that Ben condescended to touch the child, or swing him violently

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about in his big arms. The baby was never out of her sight.

Meanwhile Ben locked the door of his study, or roamed about London with his friends. When he brought them home with him, Jane was terrified. At the tavern she had held her own with the roughest roisterers, but the thought of the baby made her fearful. Chapman patted the child kindly on the head, but his hand was heavy. Young Francis Beaumont tossed him toward the ceiling, and pressed beery kisses on his cheek. He shrieked loudly, Jane trembled, the men roared with laughter. Shakspeare talked on and on about the innocence of children, and kissed the baby till he cried.

Even her son could not make Jane quite happy. She was still lonely and still depressed.

When the boy, whom they had called Benjamin, was about six months old, she began to act disturbingly. She still mourned her daughter, and her loneliness and the effects of her recent illness pounded on her mind. She mumbled to herself, she talked wanderingly to others. And then at times she flew into violent fits of temper, raging horribly at Ben and his friends. She neglected the baby for hours at a time. To all appearances, she became a nagging shrew.

Ben retreated into his study and left Jane to weep and rage alone. The sight of her eyes, especially, red as they were from crying, disturbed the flow of his verse.

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One day, when she felt more ill than usual, she wept loudly. Her long gasping sobs could be heard all over the house. Ben, who was trying vainly to make an elegant translation of Tacitus, could stand it no longer. He gathered together a pile of books and came out and stood before her.

He spoke coldly. "Until you decide to act less like a fishwife in Bedlam, you must live without me. When you determine to spare yourself the labour of such moanings, and me the discords of your abominable shriekings, I shall consider returning." He looked at her more contemptuously than angrily, and walked rapidly out of the house.

That night Jane fell asleep completely exhausted from sobbing. The next day she was painfully ill. She dragged herself out into the street and, with the baby in her arms, walked slowly to the tavern.

Her father took the child from her and put her gently to bed.

YOUNG AURELIAN TOWNSHEND had been a graduate of Oxford for less than a month when he came to London to impress the town by his poems. He gave all the poets and playwrights delicious dinners, he endeared himself to the tavern-keepers, but as a poet he remained unacclaimed.

When he met Jonson, one morning, and learned that he was in search of a studious retreat, he heard oppor-

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tunity knocking loudly. Profusely he offered the hospitality of his own lodging. Ben accepted with a grunt.

Townshend chattered incessantly. Ben threw about sarcasms till his host learned to go about silently as a mummy.

✓ For three months Ben lived upon Townshend. During that time he went out of doors scarcely a dozen times.

✓ The tragedy upon which he worked was the fall of a Roman emperor. A whole oration from Tacitus, accurately translated, was included in the dialogue. Not an action was portrayed which did not have a precedent in some classical volume. Clocks and pistols were scorned in favour of dials and javelins.

Ben pored and pored over the piece, hunting feverishly for possible anachronisms. At last it was finished. Shakspeare accepted it for his company and acted in it himself.

✓ The behaviour of the audience was most discouraging. They laughed at the unfamiliar manners of the noble Romans. They were bored by the total lack of Elizabethan manners and humour. In vain the speaker of the prologue and epilogue assured them that this was what old Roman life was like, that every speech in the play was based on Tacitus, or Pliny, or Livy.

The shopkeepers in the pit booed and hissed. Vegetables were hurled at the stage. Shakspeare himself



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laughed to hear the pedantic speeches received with jeers.

Ben was wild with rage. The boors actually seemed to prefer the anachronisms of Shakspeare and the rest to his own studious perfection.

He stepped out and made a sarcastic speech, ridiculing the audience for its ignorance and stupidity. The dignity of the populace was hurt. Much admission money was demanded back. *Sejanus* played only two nights. ✓ When it was issued in book form, it was found to swarm with foot-notes. The reader was referred to paragraphs and lines in Tacitus and Livy. Everyone laughed at it as a pedantic burlesque.

Marston made the best of his opportunity and got out a new Roman tragedy of his own. "Know," he wrote in his preface, "that I have not laboured in this poem to tie myself to relate anything as an historian, but to enlarge everything as a poet. To transcribe authors, quote authorities, and translate Latin prose orations into English blank verse, hath, in this subject, been the least aim of my studies."

The public which had been so affronted by Jonson's impertinent pedantry was grateful for Marston's biting insinuations. He was restored to favour, and his play was much applauded.

Laughter greeted Ben at every turn. The vulgar insults which he received aroused his temper. Townshend found him a most disturbing guest.

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Gradually Ben became annoyed by Townshend's simpering adulation. One morning he was walking past the Moon Tavern, quite accidentally, and heard a child laughing. He stopped, pondered a moment, then entered the tavern. He took Jane roughly in his arms and kissed her till she cried for joy. Then he ordered her to wash her face, and the three of them went back to the old house by the river.

MEANWHILE twelve city councillors, a learned judge, and countless clergymen were gathered in an assembly-room reading Ben's *Sejanus*. They shook their heads dismally over certain of the lines, which seemed to contain veiled praises of the Holy Father in Rome. "This will never, never do," they croaked in unison. They combed London for information of Ben's religious habits.

A few days later Ben was served with a paper which called Ben. Jonson *et ux.* before the London Consistory Court, and accused them of habitually absenting themselves from service and also from communion at their parish church.

On the day appointed, Jane and Ben stood guarded by constables and facing a frowning and severe semicircle of councillors and divines, with the pompous judge in the centre.

Someone read the writ. "Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

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Ben indignantly denied the charge as far as Jane was concerned. "For my part, I frankly admit that in my youth I mingled with the papists to some extent. But," he said, "for some time I have seen the error of my ways and humbly beg pardon for my transgressions." The judge, the councillors, and the clergymen looked at him darkly as he stood before them. They consulted whisperingly, and finally one of them spoke. "Are you willing, Benjamin Jonson, to touch with your lips the sacred wine, to prove in this manner the severance of your allegiance to Rome?"

Ben nodded eagerly.

In the church, a goblet of holy wine was brought in. Ben seized it with both hands and sipped the purple liquid. It was delicious. "In token of true reconciliation!" he exclaimed loudly, and drained every drop, smacking his lips enthusiastically.

The assemblage exchanged shocked glances, and indeed one of the clergymen had to be supported out of the church.

"We must be more regular with our communions," said Ben, who had not thought of religion very often since the priest had baptized him in prison, to Jane, as they walked home. Jane smiled. The ecclesiastical liqueurs were far superior to those served in the Moon Tavern.

Ben's religious scrapes were not quite over yet. A few days after he had drunk the wine, he was called to an

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informal conference at the courthouse, with only the judge and five or six clergymen present. They had been informed, they said smoothly, that Ben had not only been a papist himself, but had, moreover, "been by fame a seducer of youth to the popish religion." That, he was to realize, was a most serious offence, and struck at the very roots of England's being. What had he to say?

"I say I am being persecuted and hounded!" Ben screamed, in exasperation, and the additional expressions he used were such that one of the clergymen was forced to order him to modify his language.

"Before you sentence me," Ben shouted, "show me the evidence upon which you base your accusations. Who is it that has dared charge me with having corrupted, not only the religion, but the very morals of the youth of England?" Ben turned red and white with anger. His fat body quivered.

The judge and the ministers of God retired to an inner chamber for some moments, and when they returned, it was to say that they were impressed by the defendant's evident sincerity, and that they would throw the burden of proof upon those who had given them the information. Who those persons were, they declined to say.

Ben's mysterious accusers remained in perpetual anonymity. The case was postponed from week to

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week, no evidence was produced, and nothing ever came of it.

For some time afterwards Ben looked upon Henslowe's men with the darkest suspicions, and had he not been so fat, he would have treated some of them as he had Gabriel Spenser.

But Ben was mistaken. He should not have looked towards the Rose Playhouse, but towards the antechambers of Greenwich Palace and Windsor Castle.

ON the morning on which the case was finally dismissed, the judge, waving a manuscript, hurried up to Ben as he was leaving the courtroom. He spoke. "Will you do me the favour, sir, of reading this treatise and giving me your opinion upon it? It is my intention to have it published."

Ben received it graciously. He took it home and found it full of absurdities. A few days later he returned it with his compliments, suggesting that "His Worship should send it to the House of Correction."

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IN March 1603 a painted and bejewelled old queen writhed on the floor and died. All the poets wrote exquisite elegies, and then everyone waited with eager-



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ness for James to come riding down from Scotland to be crowned.

It was a lean summer for the dramatists and actors. All the playhouses were ordered closed in mourning. But Ben made a little money by writing a learned history of the Punic War for Sir Walter Raleigh. Sir Walter was modestly writing the history of the world and was only too glad to pay for contributions. These he changed a bit (to make them really his own) and inserted in his book. "He esteems more of fame than conscience," Ben remarked to his friends, forgetting his own long oration from Tacitus.

The poets and playwrights looked forward with eager anticipation to the time when James would hold court. He was known to be fond of scholarship, a generous patron of letters, and, indeed, a poet himself. Many poets had won honour under Eliza, but little more. The old Queen had been exacting, but stingy. The sunshine of her favour had been but figuratively golden.

So, when James began his progress to London, the English poets burst into a chorus of adulation. Every town along the way roared a welcome. London planned a celebration to eclipse any previous show of the kind. Ben was given a thousand pounds to plan and organize the festivities. Triumphal arches were soon erected throughout the city. Wreaths and garlands bloomed.

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As James rode into the city at the head of a gorgeous troupe, he was stopped every few feet by persons dressed to represent the genius of London, the ecstatic joy of the Thames, the union of Scotland with England. Bands of fairies danced before him, astonishing rainbows appeared above the street. Suns and moons shone as if by magic, dazzling constellations blazed atop the houses.

James was delighted by the magnificent show. As he approached Whitehall, a ravishingly beautiful blonde, dressed as Electra, to personify Serenity, trilled a long speech of welcome. James was quite carried away by her charms, and as she ended her speech, he leaned down and in his jovial Scotch way gave her a hearty slap between the shoulder-blades. The populace cheered lustily at this. Elizabeth would have bowed in a stately way and passed on, but the new king had already slapped himself into the hearts of his subjects.

At the grand entrance to Whitehall waited the Lord Mayor, and by his side stood Ben, the inventor of the pageant. As the King dismounted they both bowed deeply. James shook their hands forcibly and delightedly. The Lord Mayor had a most elaborate speech of welcome prepared, and was opening his lips to deliver it, when Ben, who had been drinking ale all morning, launched into a speech of his own. His voice was husky, and he clutched the railing.

"A good king is a rarity upon the earth. There have

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been many bad queens ” (here James bowed, thinking of his mother’s murderess), “ but there have been very many good queens ” (and here James bowed again, thinking of his mother); “ but there have been very many bad kings and very few good kings! ” Ben smiled with delight at his own beginning, and continued.

“ Also, Your Most Royal Majesty, there have been but few good poets ” (here Ben bowed, thinking of himself) “ and there have been very many bad poets.” (Here Ben did not bow, but thought of the King.)

“ What a rarity of rarities then must it be to see combined in the one person the best of kings and the best of poets! And it is the fortune of England to behold this miracle this day! Your Majesty, the poets of England greet you, and the dearest wish of Plato is in you fulfilled! ”

With a low bow Ben concluded.

The King flushed with delight, and, clasping Ben to him, he pressed a slimy royal kiss upon each of his fat cheeks. The Lord Mayor was ready to die with rage, but from that moment on, Ben and King James were fast friends.

The shows continued for weeks. At the arrival of the Queen and the Prince of Wales, at the coronation, at the first session of parliament — on the slightest occasion, there was a round of speech-making and spectacle. The King was as pedantic a classicist as Ben, and

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the entertainments were to him delightful beyond measure. He beamed expansively as Aurora, Zephyrus, and Flora sang one of Ben's delicious songs. He applauded loudly when Mercury finished a long speech of welcome. And when Bacchus roared out a song in praise of old Canary, the King vowed to treat Ben as a brother.

The theatres reopened with a dazzling array of thirty new dramas. Every one of them was given at court. Poets, dramatists, and actors had come to palmy days. James honoured them more lavishly than he did the indignant ambassadors.

Ben was constantly in attendance at Whitehall. He was in a jovial mood. He permitted even Marston and Dekker to join in the celebrations. They were humbly grateful, and Marston referred to Ben as "my dearest friend." When, at the end of two months, the festivities were finally over and Ben returned to his own home, he and the King were confidential companions. The King had even loaned him a manuscript copy of some of his poems, and Ben had the temerity to mark in the margins several corrections of the royal spelling. James was charmed by the appropriate and inspired verses which Ben wrote on the completion of the new wine-cellar. For his services Ben had gained nearly a thousand pounds.

Shakspeare smiled placidly at the grand commotion, and kept on writing a play called *Hamlet*.

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THOUGH James was liberal to his poets, he never forgot that he was Scotch. So he looked about for a way to recoup his grand spendings. After he had been on the throne for a few months, he began to knight worthy English merchants by the dozen. After about a gross of wealthy shipowners and cloth-dealers had been turned into viscounts, the royal treasury was as full as ever.

This was too good an opportunity for satire to be passed over, and Chapman and Marston put their heads together. They produced *Eastward Hoe*, a roaring comedy, which was acted to great popular applause. But an hour after the first performance ended, Chapman and Marston were in prison. Not only did the play ridicule the Scots in general, and satirize the wholesale creation of knights, but, worse than this, one of the actors had the audacity to mimic the King's brogue, and put the audience into a fit of laughter by saying: "I ken the man weel; he is one of my thirty-pound knights."

To the City Constable, this was treason. When he questioned the two men in the prison, Marston modestly admitted that they had not written the entire play, and that Ben Jonson had had a hand in it. And so, within an hour, two officers interrupted Ben as he was peacefully reading one of Montaigne's essays. He was seized and thrown into prison for



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the third time. The city officials were mostly Puritans, and did not share the King's love for playwrights.

The next day some minor judge groaned at the wickedness of the times and sentenced the three men to have their noses slit and their ears cut off within a week. The King, who knew nothing of the affair, was out of London. The three poets tore their hair from rage and anxiety.

MR. THOMAS FOWLER had died several years before, and Ben's old mother lived on in the house in Westminster. Although several tradesmen of the vicinity had indicated their willingness to share with the old lady the comfortable competence which was the fruit of the bricklayer's industry, she shook her head, and lived on alone. Camden called upon her faithfully every year, and their conversations usually consisted of arguments concerning Ben's latest plays. For while Camden admired them and considered them scholarly, the old lady thought them merely dull. Ben stopped in to see her once in a while, and occasionally Jane brought Benjamin the younger.

And so, one day, when Jane hurried in to say that Ben was in prison once more, and was going to have his nose slit and his ears lopped off, his mother said, quite calmly: "Not if I can help it," and hurried down to

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the jail. Her age and an extremely liberal gratuity secured her admittance, and Ben greeted her with eagerness.

The only thing to do, he said, was to get word to the King, who was in the provinces somewhere, and who would certainly cancel the sentence. He begged her to do what she could — only a few days remained. Chapman walked nervously up and down; Marston sat in a corner, sobbing. The old lady looked at Marston with disgust. She clutched his hand and dragged him to his feet. "For Christ's sake," she said, sharply, "be a man."

She hurried from the prison to Camden's house. Together they jumped into a coach and rushed about London, and that night one of Camden's pupils was galloping madly to Oxford.

FINALLY, during the night before the sentence was to be carried out, as the three men lay awake in the depths of despair, a great clattering of hoofs rang out on the cobble-stones outside the prison. With a joyful face the turnkey rushed in and told them that the King had sent his royal pardon, and that they were free. Ben and Chapman smiled at each other, and Marston burst into loud sobs of joy.

The next day, as the three poets walked out of the prison, a large crowd of their friends was waiting for them. With loud merriment they marched to old

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Camden's house, where a banquet was prepared in their honour. The old man greeted them joyfully. The house was full of courtiers, scholars, actors, poets. Ben never ruled more swaggeringly over a more brilliant gathering.

But in state, at the head of the table, sat another of Camden's friends, Ben's old mother, looking as dignified as any queen. Camden had escorted her himself from her old house in Westminster.

In the middle of the feast she rose, and, as cheer after cheer shook the room, she drank to her son.

In a firm voice she made a little speech. She showed the gathering a little paper, which was full of a white powder. 'This, she said, she had intended to bring to the prison and mix with Ben's drink had the sentence been executed. It was a lusty strong poison, which she would rather see her son drink than go about disgracefully disfigured. And, she assured the company, to show that she was no churl, she had minded first to have drunk of it herself.

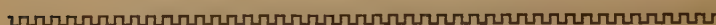
Then, with her son on one side and Camden on the other, the old Spartan walked over to the chimney and threw the poison into the flames.

Later the old dame confessed that she could never have carried on so bravely had she not helped herself liberally to white wine when the banquet was in progress. She felt rather ashamed, she said, that the puritanism of her early days had quite left her.

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WHEN James returned from Oxford, where he had been attending some Latin disputations, Ben was ordered to Whitehall and publicly honoured. The King wept to think that so valuable a personage had come so near disgrace. With his own hands he put a gold chain around Ben's short neck.

The honest but mistaken City Constable was, by royal order, deprived of his office and ducked thrice in the icy Thames.



### 13

JAMES's rather frivolous queen, the former Princess Anne of Denmark, was glad of any excuse for a masque. She adored taking part in pageants, decking herself out in all sorts of exotic finery. Her court, groaned the Puritans, was a continued maskarado.

So when it happened that her brother, the Duke of Holstein, gave notice that he would visit her in England on the very same day that her second son, Charles, was to be created Duke of York, she gurgled with delight and sent post-haste for Ben Jonson.

Two weeks later fifteen hundred pounds had been appropriated from the State funds, and everyone was rehearsing desperately for the great masque.

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CONSIDERING the difficulties involved in the composition of the piece, Ben thought he had done well. The first problem had been to invent something that would please both the King's pedantic scholarship and the Queen's frivolous magnificence. And then, since those who took part in the masque were duchesses and princesses royal, he could not hope to have them perform anything difficult or unusual. The titled people of the court were not expected to know how to sing, or to dance intricate steps. All they could do was to create an imposing show by their gorgeous costumes and fine presence. Ben could group them artistically, but he could expect no talent.

His task in this particular masque was especially difficult, for the Queen insisted upon dressing up like a blackamoor, and two of the most intelligent ladies-in-waiting were not available. Lady Nottingham was going about with her nose swathed in bandages after a recent operation for a polypus, and Lady Hatton had been exiled to the country because of an ill-tempered remark to the Queen.

MONSIEUR CONFESSE was red in the face from exasperation. "One, two, three, one, two, three," he kept screaming. He waved his little stick furiously. The violins squeaked a mournful measure. Twelve of the titled ladies of the court sighed desperately and tried their best to keep in time. The Queen's large Scan-



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dinavian feet were continually treading upon each other.

Ben Jonson watched them ill-humouredly. They moved, he thought, like frisky cows. "Do it this way, my ladies, do it this way," he called, and exhibited what he thought was the correct step. Lady Susan Vere sank to the floor fatigued and laughing. Ben's huge bulk was not made for dancing. He bumped into chairs, into the wall. "*Mon Dieu*," screamed Monsieur Confesse, who had been specially imported from Paris for the occasion, "*Mon Dieu!* Not that way, Monsieur Jonson! Like thees — one, two, three, one, two, three." The nimble Frenchman swayed back and forth.

The tired duchesses lifted their aching feet with groans. If only they could escape this torture! If only they could be taken with the measles, as Lady Hertford had been the day before!

THE great banqueting-hall of the palace was full of workmen. It was being transformed into a theatre. Under the direction of Inigo Jones, the royal architect, one end of the room was becoming a wooded landscape. At present it looked like a carpenter-shop, but Jones was sure it would come out all right. It had to. The decoration and scenic contrivances were by far the most important parts of the masque, he thought. Who would want to see a dozen duchesses

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merely doing a jig? But when they danced in front of an artificial perspective, surrounded by green trees and silhouetted by an enormous scallop-shell, played upon by realistic moonlight, then it was a sight which the Court might well enjoy.

Jones was enraged at Ben for writing a masque in which an ocean scene was necessary. The poor architect worked night and day trying to invent an indoor ocean which would not look like a ragged carpet.

But at the dress rehearsal the ocean dashed and roared delightfully.

UP in the council-room another problem of the masque was being threshed out. Would the Spanish ambassador be invited officially, and war with France be thus risked? Or should the French ambassador be the guest, and diplomatic relations with Spain be strained? Or should both be invited officially, and both refuse with indignation? Or should each be invited merely privately, with his suite? That would be the best way. Then the Dutch or the Venetian ambassador could be the official guest, and no hard feelings would occur.

But when invitations had been sent out in this manner, it was found that the French ambassador was ill, and could not come anyway, so that the Spanish ambassador had confidently expected to be invited officially. With disdain he refused to come privately. To

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avert war with Spain he was invited as joint official guest with the Venetian ambassador. The French ambassador heard of this, recovered his health amazingly, and demanded an official invitation.

The Council of State deliberated these weighty matters.

Finally Twelfth-night came, and all was in readiness.

THE QUEEN and her eleven dancing duchesses retired very early from the state dinner which preceded the masque. They left Monsieur Beaumont, the noble ambassador from France, glaring fiercely across the table at Señor Juan de Tassis, from Spain. The handsome Spaniard seemed meek and amiable enough, but he was preparing surprises for poor Beaumont which would far excel the marvels of the masque. The King carried on a lively conversation in Latin with the Dutch ambassador.

As a great bell sounded, all rose and retired to the masquing-chamber. Exclamations of wonder filled the air. One end of the enormous hall was entirely filled with Inigo Jones's great landscape. Huge trees waved their green branches, and birds fluttered about singing. Huntsmen were seen to gallop through the woods, in pursuit of actual deer. Springs gurgled deliciously. The ocean, which touched upon the forest, foamed and swelled, and sent billows breaking against the shore.

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As applause broke forth, Monsieur Beaumont noticed that while he had been admiring the scene, the Spanish ambassador had calmly appropriated the chair at the right of the King. But as the Frenchman swore with rage, the horns blew, and the masque began.

Six blue-haired tritons, blowing upon huge shells, arose from the depths of the sea and seemed to float lightly upon the waves. They played sweetly upon their enshelled flutes. Their taffeta fish-tails floated in the sea-breezes.

Behind the tritons two huge sea-horses arose, tossing their salty manes. On their backs were two charming mermaids. These ladies Ben had succeeded in obtaining only after a long search. They were the twin daughters of a singing-teacher, and their father frowned upon theatricals. He had finally surrendered to royal convenience. The two girls had charming voices — that was why they were so necessary. As they arose from the sea, the tritons stopped fluting, the sound of harps was heard, and the mermaids burst into song in the approved Italian manner. The music was delicious, and as it stopped, James stamped loudly on the floor in approval.

Two more sea-horses floated into position behind the mermaids. On these steeds were two enormous figures. Oceanus, blue-fleshed, robed in green, crowned with seaweed, rode on the one, and on the other sat Niger,

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god of the African river, his black figure robed in bright blue and adorned with pearls.

Ben Jonson, behind the scenes, watched Niger anxiously. He did not ride very steadily. The only man about the palace who had been found willing to appear in public half naked and blackened was one of the clergymen whom Anne had brought with her from Denmark. He had never been on a horse before.

The second pair of sea-horses drew behind them a large concave shell, which glowed brightly with mother of pearl, and rose and dipped on the waves.

The mermaids and tritons burst into song together, tenor and treble sweetly blending. To the measure of their song the royal masquers appeared, one by one, rising gently from the waves and taking up their positions in the brilliantly lighted shell. They personified the river-nymphs, the dusky daughters of the Niger.

The noble ladies were covered from head to foot with black paint. Narrow strips of silver cloth encircled their waists, holding in place little squares of azure-blue silk. As they flashed charming smiles at the audience, their teeth and eyes shone dazingly. And, interlaced all about their persons, ropes of huge pearls gleamed brightly.

Some of the more innocent male members of the audience gasped with astonishment. These women possessed legs and ankles! Was it natural? Did all women



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have them? They wondered, but yards of brocade prevented their coming to a definite decision.

The duchesses were not individually recognizable under their black paint, but as each stepped into the shell, she was greeted with loud applause. And as the last one stepped into position, garlanded with many more pearls than any of the others, everyone knew it must be the Queen, and cheered wildly.

About the shell twelve little children appeared, dressed in sea-green and holding lighted candles in the form of branches of coral.

INIGO JONES swelled with pleasure as he viewed his creation from the gallery. Behind the masquers in their shell the scene seemed to stretch away into a vast sea, drawn ingeniously by lines of perspective. The horizon seemed miles away, and above the trees of the forest the moon was seen to glow, obscured by clouds. The living scene rivalled the gorgeous pictures with which Rubens had decorated the ceiling of the hall.

As the second mermaid's song ceased, the Spanish ambassador shouted a loud "Bravo!" But Monsieur Beaumont remarked confidentially to the Venetian ambassador that he thought he had never seen anything more ugly than such skinny blackamoors as the duchesses turned out to be.

Now came Ben's part of the entertainment.

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Niger and Oceanus held a long dialogue. Oceanus demanded what Niger was doing so far to the west. In piteous tones Niger replied that his daughters had grown tired of being black, and that he was seeking a land where the sun shone in majesty, and where their skins would turn a dazzling white.

The Danish accent of Niger caused some merriment among the audience, and Ben stamped in exasperation.

All of a sudden the moon appeared from behind the clouds, and was seen to be the Princess Royal Elizabeth, dressed in white and seated upon a trapeze among the rafters. She carried a lighted disk. In a clear voice she welcomed Niger and his daughters to BRITANNIA, the land for which they sought, where the sunshine of royal favour always shone, and where the dusky nymphs would be metamorphosed.

As Oceanus and Niger burst into a deep bass song of thanks, a terrible accident occurred. The princess wavered sickeningly upon her swaying trapeze, and in clutching a rafter she dropped the moon into the sea, which caught fire.

The audience roared with laughter. James slapped Señor Juan wildly on the back. The French ambassador's suite squealed with merriment. But behind the scenes an orchestra began a slow and stately dance measure, and when the fire had been extinguished, the sea-horses drew the shell slowly to the shore. Here the

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dusky nymphs disembarked and treaded the dance they had learned so laboriously.

Unencumbered with garments, the duchesses performed very creditably. As they stopped, the mermaids and tritons sang another charming song, and the Princess Elizabeth, who had been handed another moon, waved them all to their shell.

When they were all in position, the horses drew them slowly away, and all disappeared behind the scene, to the accompaniment of the orchestra. The moon sang a quavering song of farewell, extinguished herself, and the masque was over.

The little Duke of York clapped his hands with infant delight. He realized as little as anyone else what was to take place forty years later on almost the same spot.

Ben appeared on the stage, bowing confidently, and was greeted with bravos. Jones, warned by a friendly triton that his coadjutor was receiving the applause, stepped up beside Ben hastily and indignantly. Together they bowed and simpered.

Behind the scene the Queen and duchesses scrubbed themselves vigorously and hastily, that they might be in time to share in the great banquet served after the masque. But long before they were scrubbed clean — in fact, as soon as the great crowd surged into the banqueting-chamber and assaulted the food — the improvised tables gave way before the crush, and the

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elaborate banquet was spread in a mess on the floor. The crash of the glass platters reminded the homesick Venetian ambassador precisely of a midsummer hail-storm smashing all the window-glass in the Palace of the Doges.

Moodily the French ambassador walked home, eating an orange. But the Spanish ambassador stayed till everyone else had gone, basking in the royal sunshine. The next morning the great chimney outside the masquing-hall crashed to the ground. Too many sturdy citizens had climbed up on it to look through the windows.

Jonson and Jones received forty pounds apiece for their services. Monsieur Confesse received fifty, and as he sailed for France, he swore to himself that he had deserved double.



THE MERMAID TAVERN in Friday Street is a long, low half-timber building. Above its large oaken door hangs a Mermaid, carved of wood and painted blue. The long row of casements blazes with light, and the sound of loud voices can be heard by those who are bold enough to be on Jacobean streets at midnight. The inside of the inn is a large low chamber, crossed

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with huge blackened beams. The walls are rough plaster, hung with leather aprons and pewter mugs. About the room are innumerable small oaken tables.

The place is crowded with men, in velvet and lace, who are talking loudly. Since early in the evening, they have sung and eaten and drunk and talked boisterously.

In a corner sit two huge and handsome men. They are always together, it seems; they live together, they share each other's clothing, they have one mistress between them. Tonight they are especially jovial and affectionate. Their newest play has just opened with loud success, and they are celebrating on the proceeds. Beaumont's huge yellow beard drips with ale, and his arm encircles Fletcher's broad back.

Opposite them Ben Jonson and Chapman sit side by side, over the remains of a dish of eels. Ben tries in vain to spear an eel with the newly-invented fork, and in exasperation flings the fork across the room. With his large hand he dips up an eel from the greasy dish and conveys it drippingly to his mouth. He smacks his lips loudly, and washes the eel down with a deep tankard of Canary.

Shakspeare sits a bit apart, talking in low tones with Sir Robert Cotton. Both of them seem reserved amid conviviality. Shakspeare's face is pale and quiet, his clothes are immaculate, his glass of wine is barely touched. The two men talk innocently of books. Sir Robert is



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endeavouring to collect a library of old manuscripts; Shakspeare gives away all his books as soon as he is finished with them, he says. Ben interrupts loudly — “ Ay, as soon as you have appropriated their contents! ” The men laugh and pound on the table. Shakspeare smiles, but seems not pleased.

Chapman is quite drunk, and begins to sing —

*“ When flesh is cheap, and females dear. . . . ”*

Young John Donne, across the table, silences the raucous discord by flinging a pot of sack in Chapman’s face. He gasps loudly, and subsides into drunken snores.

Beaumont and Fletcher talk condescendingly with two very eager youths. They are relating the circumstances of the murder of Kit Marlowe, ten years before. The two boys listen eagerly. They are down from Cambridge for a few days, and this is their first experience among such a famous gathering. One of them feels a bit nervous. It seems that it was in just such a boisterous tavern-gathering as this that young Marlowe was stabbed.

Ben Jonson stands up, sways a bit unsteadily, and pounds on the table. His red hair is in wild disorder, his eyes are bloodshot. Authoritatively he begins a loud oration. He points threateningly at one of the young Cambridge students. “ Would you be a great writer of comedies and pageants, like me, without a rival? ”

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He leers at the student, who blushes, and gulps an assent. "Then, young man," Ben clutches the table for support, takes a deep breath and wags his head importantly, "then, young man, imitate the example of the industrious bumble-bee, who sucks honey from all sorts of flowers and lays it up in a general repository." He grins fatuously and the young student seems embarrassed. "Then, too, young man, above all, follow the classics, follow the classics, follow the ——" With a jerk Shakspeare pulls Ben down into a chair. "Keep your wits," he says, "and stop bellowing." Ben's huge bulk crashes on to the chair, which cracks loudly. He looks at Shakspeare with a reproachful air. The inn-keeper stares sorrowfully.

Shakspeare and Cotton prepare to go, and try to drag Ben with them. He refuses to budge, buries his face in his hands, and weeps loudly. He reaches for a tankard. He drinks until he falls into a slobbering sleep.

"Not as verbose as usual tonight," remarks Fletcher, as Shakspeare leaves the room. Beaumont laughs a bit tipsily.

One of the Cambridge youths questions curiously. "That was William Shakspeare, wasn't it, *the* William Shakspeare, the *great* Wil ——"

Fletcher interrupts testily. "Yes, my young friend, *the* William Shakspeare, and God be praised there's only ——"

"Hush, John," says Beaumont, laughing. And then,

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"Evidently Will isn't in the sonnet-making mood tonight."

"How can you tell?" asks the other student, timidly.

"He doesn't write in this room, does he?"

"God, no," replies Beaumont, winking across the table, "but you see when he wants to write a sonnet or two, he drinks many mugs of beer. Beer makes for sonnets, you know."

"I see." The student nodded. "And wine ——?"

"If Will was drinking wine tonight, it means he's busy on a wedding scene, in blank verse."

The room shrieked with laughter, and the student looked puzzled, for to him and his companion the details of Shakspeare's marriage were unknown.

Fletcher looked up tipsily. "My young sir, Will Shakspeare is the noblest, finest, wisest, sweetest ——" His tongue can serve him no further, and his eyes fill with drunken tears.

Beaumont stands up and drags Fletcher with him. Together they stagger out of the room and home. The two students seek their rooms for the night. Chapman snores heavily. Young Donne wraps Ben's huge body in his loose, coachman's coat and tries in vain to carry him from the room. Jonson's drunken weight is immovable. Gradually he opens his eyes, and with his arm about Donne's shoulder he reels out.

Donne guides him through the streets and to bed.

Ben sleeps heavily, and awakes the next morning in a

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dripping sweat, but with brave notions. He swathes himself in blankets and writes for several hours. Gradually he becomes cooler, and the perspiration subsides. He throws down his pen and dresses for the day.

He always writes under these conditions. His drunken salty sweat seems to bring him inspiration.



### 15

IN November England shook from end to end with the explosion of the Gunpowder Plot. In the great excitement the Earl of Salisbury called Ben to a secret meeting of the Council. The ministers of state begged him, "as a former Catholique," to pretend to re-embrace the faith, to go piously into the confessionals, to gain much damning information about the plot to blow up Parliament.

Ben was much flattered at his political début. He did as he was asked, he sought the old confessionals, the old Jesuits. But he could do nothing. For when the plot fell through, the old Jesuits had taken good care to rush out of London.

Another person who disappeared mysteriously at this time was the French ambassador. Tongues wagged at court, and Señor Juan de Tassis smiled placidly.

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ON Twelfth-night, after things had quieted down a bit, a strange wedding was celebrated in the palace of Whitehall. The King and Queen and all the nobility packed the great room to see two of the greatest houses of England united.

The bride, Lady Frances Howard, was thirteen. The groom, Robert, Earl of Essex, who carried himself as gravely as a bishop, was fourteen. As the two children walked slowly up the aisle together, sweet music played, and politicians smiled.

The marriage was followed by one of Ben's masques. Inigo Jones had invented so many new machines that they filled half the hall, and only persons of quality could be admitted. Even at that, the ladies were forbidden to wear farthingales.

The masque was a gorgeous mixture of Greek and Roman marriage festivities. As Juno and her train danced on a huge revolving ball of gold, and the music of harps and violins floated in from the remotest corners of the hall, the two married little children looked on with delight. Peacocks spread their gorgeous tails all over the room.

At the close of the masque, as the player bride and groom entered their rosy nuptial bower, the musicians stepped up to the real bridal pair and sang a luscious marriage song.

Ben had translated it from one of the ancient Roman epithalamia. As the musicians sang sweetly, one after



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another of the noble ladies present began to blush. At the end of the third stanza Queen Anne, blazing in diamonds and pearls, looked imploringly at James. The King rose, motioned unwillingly for an end, and the musicians retired. The two children looked on wonderingly.

During the dance which followed the masque, the Spanish ambassador was in heaven. As his beautiful red gown mingled with the sky-blue and green costumes of the various ladies who asked him to dance, he purred with satisfaction. The French ambassador was still missing, but his wife looked on sadly at the Spanish success. She had charitably urged the Queen not to expose the feeble Spaniard to the danger of catarrh by inviting him to the entertainment. But the old man smiled at her as he pranced by. He whirled about so energetically that James pounded him on his bony back and pronounced him a "lusty old reveller."

When the evening's festivities finally ended, the two children were fast asleep. They were roughly awakened. They smiled shyly at each other. They had seen each other only once before.

That very night the young bridegroom and his tutor set sail for France. The bride lived on in London with her mother. When they saw each other again, after four years, music and smiles had turned into conspiracy and hatred.

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✓IN the spring the plague descended upon London. The Court hastily left the city, and Ben was ordered to accompany it.

Jane stayed in London, watching the wagons go from door to door, collecting the corpses. The men on the wagons rang the bells of houses whose doors were marked with red crosses, and shouted: "Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead!" Young Ben was now four. Already he looked like his father. His head was exactly like Ben's. The child fretted at being shut in the gloomy old house all day.

Ben stayed at the country-house, in Huntingdonshire, of Sir Robert Cotton, who had been at Westminster a year or two senior to him. When James had ascended the English throne, Sir Robert had gone to great lengths to magnify his own Scottish ancestry. He had even purchased the room, in Fotheringay Castle, where Mary Stuart had been beheaded, and, transporting it piece by piece, he had had it built into his house in the English countryside.

Old Camden was also staying at the house. It was a pleasant retreat from the plague. The library was a paradise, full of old manuscripts taken from the monasteries. The three men sat up late, poring over ancient parchments.

One night thunder roared and crashed. Lightning crackled. Tons of rain beat against the old house. Ben's

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room was the one brought down from Scotland, and as he went to bed, rather nervously that night, a huge oak-tree outside his window was rent from top to bottom.

Ben tossed in his sleep. He dreamed. His son appeared to him, surrounded by a misty haze. He implored him to come home. The mist gradually faded away; the child's face loomed up clearly, lighted by a flash of greenish lightning. In the middle of his forehead was the mark of a bloody cross. He seemed to have been cut by a sword. Blood dripped slowly down the child's pale cheek.

Ben awoke suddenly. He was soaked with sweat. The thunder and lightning still roared and flashed. He prayed in terror and rushed to Camden's chamber. The old man comforted him, scoffed at his fantasy. They sat up all night, listening to the thudding of the rain on the roof.

The next morning a letter was brought to Ben. It was from London, from Jane. Their child was dead of the plague.

The King would not permit his valuable poet to risk death in the infected city. He even intercepted Ben's letters to Jane.

Jane waited and waited in the silent house. When she could wait no longer, she carried her dead child into the street. She followed the wagon of corpses. She saw the body of her son thrown into a pit with a hun-

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dred others, sprinkled with caustic, and roughly covered with earth.

No one ever saw Jane again. No one knows whether she died from grief or from the plague. Ben knew as little as anyone, and, really, cared as little too.

He drowned his conventional sorrow in gallons of sack, and within a very few weeks he was playing the fat cavalier to a charming lady in the country. Sitting down one morning in his usual reeking, steaming sweat, he wrote her an exquisite little song which everyone still sings:

*Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,  
And I'll not look for wine.  
The thirst that from the soul doth rise  
Doth ask a drink divine;  
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.*

*I sent thee late a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honouring thee  
As giving it a hope that there  
It could not withered be;  
But thou thereon didst only breathe,  
And sent'st it back to me;  
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,  
Not of itself but thee.*

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"Indeed, sir," wrote the lady back, "are you not rather elephantine to play the Cupid?"

Who she was, nobody knows, but she played Venus at one of the court masques, and Ben wrote verses to her until he was past fifty.

THE EARL OF SALISBURY had built a magnificent new country-house at Theobald's. He entertained the entire Court. The nobility promenaded through the delightful gardens, the long, pleached alleys, the great lawns bordered by fantastically clipped yews.

King James was charmed. Theobald's reminded him vaguely of Scotland. He pulled in trout for hours from the well-stocked streams. The longer he stayed, the more delighted he became. He could not bear to leave. He remembered his nationality and his position. He "offered" his royal palace at Hatfield Chase in exchange for Theobald's.

The Earl of Salisbury locked the door of his beautiful new chamber and stamped with feeble rage. An hour later he accepted the King's offer with profuse thanks.

Salisbury ordered Ben to prepare a magnificent entertainment.

The whole Court assembled, one night, in the banquet-hall at Theobald's. At the end of a gorgeous pageant, during which the Lares and Penates wafted to



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the skies the praises of the royal pair, Salisbury presented the keys and the deed to the King. The Court applauded and James smiled happily.

Lady Salisbury rushed to her room and wept. Hatfield Chase was a gloomy old house, and had the look of a prison.

✓ AT the end of the summer the plague lessened and gradually died out. The nobility trooped back to London and expressed surprise at the small number of people to be seen on the streets.

Ben went to his old house. It was cold and dark. Mice scampered into corners, and bugs crawled everywhere. He took his books and furniture to his new chambers near Camden in Westminster, in the old stone house under which you pass as you go out of the churchyard into the old palæe.

✓ He spent a busy winter. He was called on for entertainments by the Court, by the Guild of Merchant Tailors (whom he snubbed disdainfully), by the City of London. He received a regular income from the City, and was called on when needed. He gave great dinners at the taverns. He dressed himself up in red and yellow velvet. He spent huge sums on choice wines, on rare books, on mediæval parchments.

He dressed himself up in red and yellow velvet. And lace, too. But washing he considered a mere waste of time. His hands were always black and grimy, his fat

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face greasy. Somewhat of a gentleman, he meditated, gives a tincture to a scholar; too much stains him.

The only fly in his ointment, he thinks moodily, is Shakspeare, who keeps throwing off play after play, full of absurdities, full of bombastic language. Yet the people cheer themselves hoarse and scream for more.

But Ben is consoled. The King pounds him on the back. "Shakspeare may be sent from heaven," James says loudly, "but you, Ben, you come from the academies!"

Ben is consoled. And as commission after commission pours in upon him, for masques, for pageants, for plays, he comes to consider his rival less with envy than with easy contempt.

"After all," he says comfortably to anyone who praises Shakspeare, "after all, every nature is not a fit stock to graft a scholar on."

He grows fatter and fatter. He is the pot-bellied darling of the Court.



HENRY, PRINCE OF WALES, was eighteen years old. His body was well formed and strong. He played tennis, excessively, and plunged daily into the cold waters of the Thames. He adored oysters. He devoured

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them raw, fried, stewed. One day, after four grueling sets of tennis, he hastily swallowed several handfuls of raw oysters and a green melon. Then he rushed to the river for a swim, and in a week he was dead.

The nation burst into a wail of grief. Tender elegies appeared by the dozen, whole towns swathed themselves in black. The Court plunged into the deepest mourning. Queen Anne went in and out of hysterics, the King managed a few tears. Young Prince Charles wept to lose his likable brother, but was much excited to think that now he would be the next king, and rule for ever and ever amid the glories of Whitehall.

The theatres closed in mourning, the play-writers faced a lean winter.

Ben Jonson cursed. There would be no masques for months.

Inigo Jones wept with vexation. In tears he waited upon the kindly Earl of Pembroke. Gratefully he accepted a hundred pounds. He set out post-haste for Italy and spent months measuring Palladian palaces.

Meanwhile Sir Walter Raleigh was still languishing in the Tower, still writing the *History of the World*. He was worried about his sixteen-year-old son. The boy was growing up in ignorance of the world, of which his father pretended to know everything. He had never been outside London, his father realized sadly. He needed polish.

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Sir Walter heard that Ben was out of a job. He was pleased, and sent for him.

Two weeks later Ben, amazed to find himself a tutor and governor, set sail with his young pupil for France.

Young Raleigh was a wild colt. He had roamed about London at will, associating with the most disgraceful and reckless rakes. The boy knew far more about the ways of the world than his father imagined. To Ben's mind he was the fiend incarnate, created expressly for the purpose of irritating corpulent persons of importance. But the young fellow had a handsome face and the most charmingly hypocritical manners, and Ben was helpless.

Armed with letters of introduction from all the nobility of England, they began the grand tour.

At Rouen Ben learned the delicious mysteries of those wines which are sacred to France. Leaving his pupil in charge of a servant, he visited tavern after tavern. The fascinating French serving-girls were charmed by this gruff, swaggering Englishman. They brought him the most precious nectars. They sat delightedly on his broad knee.

One day young Raleigh slyly followed his tutor. His suspicions had been long aroused concerning the "antique monuments" which Ben visited. Noiselessly he followed him into the tavern, watched him hug the giggling girls and sip the red and white and yellow

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liquids. The lad called to the innkeeper. They whispered together.

Ben was in paradise. The girls brought him bottle after bottle, more than ever before. He drank and drank. Soon he fell back helplessly.

Young Raleigh capered with delight. He called to servants. Together they stripped the drunken Ben stark naked and laid him on a flat cart. They stretched his arms out from his mountainous flabby body. Tooting shrill horns they pulled the cart through the streets. They exhibited him, naked and mumbling, to the amazed crowds. "*Mesdames et messieurs, voyez! Voyez le crucifement!*" The crowds roared with laughter. They pulled him the whole length of the old city. Men and women packed the streets. Ben was soon restored to his senses by the gallons of icy water and other liquids dashed upon him from upper windows. Vainly he pulled at the cords which bound him, vainly he roared thick curses into the air. The horns tooted maddeningly. Young Raleigh's voice was hoarse from shouting. "*Voyez! Voyez! Une image vivante du crucifement!*"

When Sir Walter received Ben's indignant letter, he flew into a rage and called his son a worthless fool. But Lady Raleigh laughed with delight at the escapade and reminded her husband that "when young, he too was so inclined."

A few days after this disgraceful scene Ben and his



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pupil left Rouen for Paris. The amused citizens of Rouen noticed that the boy's face was covered with black and blue marks and that he limped painfully.

Once in Paris, Ben took no risks, but placed his pupil in a rigidly disciplined school, and set out himself to see the city.

He called at the palace of the Cardinal du Perron. This ecclesiastic was nothing if not a person of repute. While he was still a young man, he had been chosen to deliver the funeral *éloge* of the great Ronsard. His *bons mots* were famous all over Europe. His polished wit, his eloquent sermons, his profound scholarship, had reached Ben's ears.

Ben presented a letter from the Earl of Arundel. But the worthy prelate treated this English mountebank with disdain, polite disdain. Loftily he pointed out his antique marbles, his Ghirlandajos, his Raphaels. As a special favour he showed Ben his translation of Virgil, then in progress. Ben took the manuscript, read a few lines in silence. Roughly he threw it down. "It is naught," he said bluntly to the insulted Cardinal. Disgustedly he swaggered out of the house without a farewell.

He was presented to King Henry IV in the gardens of the Tuileries; he attended, with much disgust, several dramatic performances, visited many of the nobility. He was treated with courtesy, but never on the terms of equality which prevailed, generally, in London. He

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became disgusted with the lacy manners of the French, and became more ponderously English than ever.

When he had been in Paris a few weeks, he was surprised and delighted one day to receive a message by special courier from James, commanding his immediate presence at Whitehall. Unregretfully he took his sullen pupil out of school and sailed for home.

Sir Walter Raleigh was much dissatisfied with his son's progress, even for so short a period, and for a time he acted towards Ben with considerable coolness. But the young rake was fated to make little use of any polish he might acquire. He soon accompanied his father to the New World and died, screaming in agony, from the wound made by a poisoned arrow shot from an ambush on the banks of the Orinoco.

THE mourning at the English court did not last long. After all, the office of Prince of Wales could be filled very easily. So in less than three months the Court quickly cast off its sorrow and rushed into elaborate preparations for the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth, only daughter of the King and Queen, to the high and mighty Prince Frederick, by the grace of God, Count Palatine of the Rhine, Arch-sewer and Prince Elector of the Holy Roman Empire, Duke of Bavaria, and Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter.

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Ben was called from France to supervise the entertainments. Dramas, fireworks, sham sea-fights, masques, processions, and banquets made London delirious for weeks.

The Earl of Pembroke was so pleased with the celebrations that he ever afterwards presented Ben with twenty pounds every New Year's Day, to buy books.

The Princess and the Count Palatine set sail for the continent, but their ship lay off Kent for two weeks, languishing for a wind.

So nimble were the royal publicity agents that eight days before the ship left the English coast, a book appeared in London describing the ecstatic enthusiasm with which the newly-wedded pair had been greeted in Heidelberg.

ONE afternoon soon after Ben had returned from Paris, he was sitting with Sir Henry Wotton in the Globe Theatre, where *Henry VIII*, by Shakspeare and Fletcher, was being gorgeously produced.

It is the fourth scene of Act one. King Henry enters the scene, elaborately dressed. The audience applauds, and on the stage two cannons are shot off. One of the cannons hurls its bit of wadding up on to the thatched roof. A thin blue smoke curls up.

The audience is engrossed in the splendid spectacles on the stage. The smoke grows thicker. Soon the whole circle of the roof is blazing fiercely. Tiles be-

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gin to fall, bricks and burning thatch drop on the audience.

The house is in an uproar. Everyone pushes and struggles to get out one of the two narrow doors. Women scream and faint. Ben pushes himself brutally through the crowd.

Outside, a man rushes about, roaring loudly and painfully. The seat of his breeches is blazing. People point at him and laugh at his frantic terror. Ben hurries over to him and quenches his fire with the contents of a huge bottle of ale which he had brought with him to the play. The man wrings out his breeches and lets the stream of ale fall into his mouth.

Crowds from the city come and watch the theatre burn to the ground.

The Puritans, who are slowly gaining in numbers, croak dismally. The destruction of the playhouse is a fearful judgment of God.



✓ EARLY in 1614 Ben wrote *Bartholomew Fair*, which was received with great delight by the common people, and did much to counteract his increasingly unfavourable pedantic reputation. *Bartholomew Fair* was ordered to be given at court. This command was

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welcome to the actors, all of whom were glad to play at court at any time. For in Whitehall they were less liable to stutter and stammer from being choked with the stench of garlic, or to be suffocated by the fumes arising from the damp jacket of a beer-brewer.

The Court expressed great pleasure at *Bartholomew Fair*, which abounds in low comedy. James, especially, was much delighted. About the only person who did not enjoy the play was the poet Samuel Daniel, a well-meaning old play-writer who had for many years considered himself the official poet of the Court. Ben's popularity with the nobility, which increased daily, made old Daniel nervous, and the great success of *Bartholomew Fair* made him positively vindictive. He was heard to utter various peevish remarks.

After the play James took Ben aside and chatted with him with greater familiarity than ever. They drank together until both felt in a projected mood. Ben led the conversation to Daniel. "Daniel is a good honest man," he said to the King. "But," shaking his big head sadly, he whispered, "he is no poet." James seemed to agree with him, for he at once called loudly and ordered that Ben be given a pension of a hundred marks per annum. They embraced affectionately and Ben walked home unsteadily, but very happy. For the giving of the pension amounted to making him poet laureate. A few days later Samuel Daniel left the Court angrily, and retired to rural seclusion.



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IT was unfortunate that, shortly after being created poet laureate, Ben should write a masque which should displease the Court.

But now that he was officially the court poet, he felt that he was in a position to direct Jones, rather than to collaborate with him. So the irritated architect was ordered to prepare but little machinery for the new Twelfth-night masque, so as to leave much time for Ben's sonorous speeches and sweet songs.

But the Court missed the gorgeous and changing scenery and expressed its disapproval in loud tones. The costumes were good, the lyrics delectable, and the music enchanting, but there were no moving golden balls or shifting seas or drifting clouds. Instead, merely ten little boys dressed as bottles appeared, and tossed to and fro, with their combined strength, a short, fat old man dressed as a barrel. This was very dull indeed.

In fact, much more attention was paid to a dusky young woman who sat in one of the royal boxes than to the masque itself. This was the Princess Pocahontas, the daughter of a fabulously wealthy Virginian king. She had married a young Englishman, and had arrived in London with him that day. As she looked at the charming costumes on the duchesses about her, she was enraptured, and she laughed till she cried at the bottle scene. She was not sorrowful at being transferred from a wigwam to a Whitehall. To the English

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Court, she was a symbol of all the gold in the New World, and was treated with all the honours extended to any princess royal.

The bottle scene was thought by some to poke fun at the King's bibulous tendencies, and was so very bore-some that many suggested that Ben return to his old trade of bricklaying.

Ben and Jones had never been particularly friendly, and this masque caused a battle of words between them, each blaming the other for the failure of the performance. They quarrelled so loudly that they could be heard all through the hall. But the King was terribly bored, and paid no attention to them. Soon he had drowned his disgust so deeply that when the Dutch Commissioners came up to bid him farewell, he was unable to move or say anything, but simply raised his hat from time to time, putting it on again at once, like an automaton.

But Ben was soon restored to the royal favour. When *Bartholomew Fair* was published, it was ordered suppressed, by the censor, on account of its shockingly large number of oaths. It was precisely on account of the delicious oaths that James had liked the play, and Ben went to him for redress. Between them they adjusted the matter to the censor's satisfaction by making an enormous concession. They rendered the oaths innocent and harmless by writing "God" and "Lord" with small letters instead of capitals.

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✓ IN 1611 Shakspeare had written *The Tempest*. Then he had bowed graciously to the charmed audience, gathered together his entire fortune (it was a fairly large one), retired to Stratford, and applied for a coat of arms. There, in the charming old house covered over with roses, he lived in pastoral calm with Anne Hathaway. Like Darby and Joan, they sat placidly in the garden, or strolled through the daisy meadows. All about them were the affectionate rural friends of their childhood.

Occasionally the quiet languour of the days would be broken by the arrival of old friends from London. Richard Burbage, with noisy gossip of the stage; Michael Drayton, to read his newest poems; agents from the theatres, begging for another play.

For five years Shakspeare lived peacefully in Warwickshire, and during all that time Ben Jonson never once saw him. Ben wrote masque after masque, play after play, travelled in France, drank and quarrelled in London. Finally, after the failure of the masque at court, he left London indignantly to spend a few days in the country. Taking Drayton with him, he set out for Stratford.

Shakspeare was gushingly happy to see them. The three men talked in delightful intimacy. Ben was a bit bored by Shakspeare's long praises of country life, Shakspeare was rather offended by Ben's loud boastings,

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but they gossiped happily of London, engaged in combats of sparkling wit. In the garden the crab-trees were in bloom. There they spent the evenings in quiet pleasure.

In a very few days, however, the oppressive quiet of sleepy old Stratford made Ben extremely restless. With bluff frankness he announced his disgust after spending an afternoon in fruitless fishing, and proclaimed his speedy return to London.

That evening they sat talking in the garden as usual, and at midnight, Ben, emboldened by sack, set out on foot to London. When he arrived, a few days later, the news was awaiting him that Shakspeare was dead.

BEN's feeling was, really, one of great relief. He and Shakspeare had been friends, even intimate friends, but as long as Shakspeare was living, Ben knew quite well that he himself was not the greatest poet in England. He had always talked of Shakspeare in tones of scorn, but everyone suspected that he felt envy as well.

Now, however, he could afford to praise his dead rival to the skies. So he wrote the most laudatory poem to the memory of his "beloved master, William Shakspeare." He filled it with the most extravagant praise, sorrow and affection. He avowed his own unworthiness:

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*Soul of the age!*

*The applause, delight, the wonder of our stage!*

*My SHAKSPERE rise! . . .*

*Thou art a monument without a tomb,*

*And art alive still while thy book doth live,*

*And we have wits to read, and praise to give. . . .*

*Sweet Swan of Avon! what a sight it were*

*To see thee in our water yet appear,*

*And make those flights upon the banks of Thames*

*That so did take Eliza and our James!*

*But stay; I see thee in the hemisphere*

*Advanced, and made a constellation there!*

*Shine forth, thou Star of Poets, and with rage*

*Or influence chide or cheer the drooping stage,*

*Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourned  
like night,*

*And despairs day, but for thy volume's light.*

Immediately after finishing this passionate elegy Ben set about to make his position secure. He gathered together all of his plays which had appeared. He polished them, garnished them with foot-notes and prefatory remarks, and published them in a huge folio volume. While other dramatists had published their plays and called them, on the title-page, "Plays," Ben, in classical style, announced them as his *Works*. The book sold widely, but many poked fun at the portentous title. Ben retorted testily that while most



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men's works were but play, his plays were truly works.

To many, there had seemed something mysterious about Shakspeare's death. It was vaguely known to have been caused by a fever. Some said that a lane which ran by his house was a resort of straying pigs, and caused a pestilential atmosphere. Others heard that he had caught a chill by walking in the rain.

His funeral, too, was held very quietly; and was it not strange that he should be buried seventeen feet deep, with a weird inscription on his grave?

*Good frend for Jesus sake forbear  
To digg the dust enclosed heare:  
Bleste be ye man yt spares thes stones,  
And curst be he that moves my bones.*

All sorts of rumours floated about, and when it became known that Ben and Drayton had visited Shakspeare the day before his death, tongues flew wildly. Soon everyone in London knew the "authentic" story. Shakspeare, Drayton, and Jonson had had a merry meeting. In an excess of joy at seeing his old friends, it seems that Shakspeare drank too hard. When Ben and Drayton left, Shakspeare wept, and in a drunken idyllic sorrow fell asleep under the fragrant

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crab-apple-tree. The damp ground caused a raging fever, and the next day he died.

Ben, however, was never heard to confirm this story. Its authenticity was derived from the fact that he never denied it.

But Shakspeare smiled calmly in the groves of Parnassus. And as he saw his own name entered in the church book at Stratford, he beamed with quiet content. The entry read, "W. Shakespeare *gentleman*."



Now that his position in the literary world was unchallengeable, Ben began to remind himself that he was the grandson of a courtier of position. He frequented the society of the cultivated nobility, and was gratified to find that they treated him well and expected no servility. If they overlooked his rather distant noble connexions, they at least afforded him the respect due to a man of letters.

If they ever chanced to offend his colossal dignity, he resented it loudly.

One day he was invited to dine with Lord Salisbury, the Lord Treasurer. Most undiplomatically he was given a place next to Inigo Jones. Together they sat silently at the foot of the table. Lord Salisbury, de-

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formed and emaciated, chatted with his noble friends. Suddenly he noticed that Ben's face was dark with anger. "Dear Ben," he questioned smoothly, "why are you not glad?" "My lord," said Ben angrily, "you promised I should dine with you, but I do not."

He spent short vacations in the country with Sir Philip Sidney's niece. The Earl of Arundel was always delighted to talk with him about his great collections of marbles and paintings. One of his most intimate friends was Lady Rutland, who consoled herself in a cold and childless marriage by lavishing favours on poets. At times Lord Rutland became annoyed at his wife's gracious hospitality, and Ben's delicious visits were ordered stopped.

Occasionally he wrote a masque, but most of his time ✓ was spent in visiting or drinking. His bulk became even larger, his belly was mountainous. One morning he became dizzy and fell to the ground. Alarmed, he visited a physician. The doctor stripped him, examined him with incredulous amusement. He was abnormally, enormously, fat, he said; exercise was absolutely essential. He recommended walking.

At once Ben made a round of boisterous farewells and started to walk. He walked and walked. Rivers of sweat ran off him, his clothes dripped with it. He lost pound after pound. He walked and walked for weeks. One morning he was surprised to find himself in Scotland.

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JOHN TAYLOR was a waterman on the Thames. But in his soul he worshipped poesy. He printed pamphlets, and soon became known as the Water-Poet.

One day Ben Jonson stepped heavily into his boat and ordered him to row him across the Thames.

The boatboy whispered to Taylor. An expression of enraptured adoration appeared on the water-poet's face. He addressed Ben extempore:

*"I am told by my boy, thou art Jonson the Poet;  
If true, an Epigram, quickly, to show it:  
I tell thee I'm Taylor that plies near the Strand,  
A Poet by Water, as thou art by Land."*

Ben gazed at him in haughty surprise. He answered condescendingly:

*"A Poet by Water can never be fired;  
By the juice of the grape the Muse is inspired:  
Yet thy aiming at Wit deserveth some Praise:  
But Water ne'er nourished the Laurel or Bays."*

And as they reached the opposite shore Ben flung the admiring neophyte a silver coin.

Taylor sought publicity for his muse. He pasted hundreds of hand-bills all over London, advertising to the public that at the Hope Playhouse he would engage in

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a contest of wit with a certain William Fennor, who proudly styled himself "The King's Majesty's Riming Poet."

On the appointed day the house is filled with a great crowd. They have paid high prices to hear two such well-known extemporal wits. But Fennor does not appear. Mutterings and mumblings are heard. Taylor steps out to appease their anger. At his appearance yells and cries break out. Stones and boards fill the air, ale-bottles drop about the terrified poet. The audience screams and booes.

Taylor flees from the theatre. He flees from London. Passing through Windsor, he learns that Jonson has gone through a few days before. Penniless, he sets out to follow him. "Great poets," he thinks, "follow the same course."

ALTHOUGH Ben did not know himself that he was going to Scotland, he found that the news of his approach had preceded him. At Leith Mr. John Stuart, an obscure relative of the King's, greeted him effusively. Ben spent the night at his house, enchanting the young Scotchman with his boisterous tales of London. The next morning, as he was about to set out, a weary and drooping figure rushed up the path. It was Taylor. He sank to the ground and kissed Ben's shoe. Amazed, Ben questioned him. Taylor poured forth his devotion to the muse, his worship of Ben's poetry, his

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desire to be associated with him, his faithful pursuit from London to Leith. Ben was much flattered and John Stuart much impressed. Good-naturedly Ben presented the delighted poet with twenty-two shillings. "To drink my health in England," he said loftily. He continued on his way. Taylor hurried back to London and wrote a long account of his "Penny-les Pilgrimage," which set the town roaring with laughter.

The next day Ben arrived in Edinburgh. He was astonished to find the city decorated, and crowds cheering him as he walked up the street. A deputation of the Council awaited him. They escorted him to the city hall. The freedom of the city was conferred upon him. A huge banquet was prepared, and the good Scotch citizens drank enthusiastically to England's greatest poet.

Ben spoke graciously. "My grandfather," he said, "came first from Annandale before settling in England. He served King Henry the Eighth and was a gentleman, a Scotch gentleman transplanted. He was sharp, though soft-mannered. My own father was one of England's greatest scholars, and lost all his estate under the damnable poperies of Mary Tudor. He was cast into prison, forfeited all his property, and at last, under the late Elizabeth, turned minister of the gospel. I, then, am but two generations removed from Scottish earth. No longer need Caledonia blush when the



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word 'poet' is spoken! For the royal master of all Britain, too, is a poet — he in his way and I in mine — together we are proud to defend the name of Scotland against its calumniators. Drink to Scotland! Drink to Edinburgh, Britain's other eye! May she be worthy the glory her poets shed upon her!"

The citizens of Edinburgh gulped down gallons of whisky in tremendous enthusiasm, and the city shook upon its rocks with the ferocity of their applause.

The banquet was a lavishly elaborate affair. Whole pigs and lambs disappeared under frenzied carving; pheasants were borne in, golden-brown and garlanded with flowers; creams, jellies, pastes, and cordials gleamed deliciously.

Ben was so far affected, before it was all over, that he told a long story about a wonderful elephant, who could read and write, and was sent to England as ambassador from the Great Mogul, and was allowed twelve baskets of bread and twenty quarts of Canary-wine every day besides the nuts and almonds the citizens' wives sent him, and who had a Spanish boy for an interpreter, and whose chief negotiation was conferring with the chief royal jester, about stealing Windsor Castle and carrying it away on his back.

The feast cost exactly two hundred twenty-one pounds, six shillings, and fourpence. A few days later the excise upon whisky and smoked herrings was slightly increased.

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A FEW miles outside of Edinburgh, in the charming village of Hawthornden, lived William Drummond, a young poet. He lived in solitude, writing exquisite verses and holding correspondence with his friends all over Europe. For many years he had corresponded regularly with Michael Drayton. When Drayton wrote to him that Ben Jonson was in Scotland, young Drummond smiled a languid smile of pleasure. Now he could meet the charming poet whose verses he so envied.

The day after the celebration at Edinburgh, Drummond walked out to the high road early in the morning. He sat down under a tree by the side of the road and waited, reading. He read all morning. No one came by.

In the middle of the afternoon he saw a figure in the distance. His heart beat, but as the figure approached, he was disappointed, and a bit fearful. He had hoped it might be Jonson, but it was only a short, fat tramp. The vagabond seemed short of breath, his clothes were ragged, he twirled a thick club. Drummond wished he had brought his pistols. As the tramp came up to him, Drummond spoke timidly. "My good fellow, can you tell me anything of the poet Jonson? Is he not to pass here today?"

The tramp looked at him contemptuously and laughed. "Young man, *I* am Jonson!"

Drummond gasped. This, Ben Jonson? This fat, dirty,

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greasy, ragged ruffian, the maker of the most enchanting verses in the world?

He made profuse apologies. He introduced himself, and craved the honour of entertaining the famous poet in his poor cottage. With dignity, Jonson accepted. As they walked along together, Drummond was in a daze. Never before had he seen a poet who looked so exactly like a butcher.

For two weeks Jonson stayed as Drummond's guest, and they were the two most exhausting weeks the Scottish poet ever experienced. For Ben was fatigued from all his walking and demanded much attention.

In the evening the two men sat by the fire and talked. They were an ill-matched pair. On one side of the table sat Drummond, with his pale, refined, insignificant profile, shrinking at the vigorous expressions loudly used by the mountainous figure opposite him. Ben drank gallons of his host's rare wines, and sprawled disgustingly all over the exquisite house.

As the precise Drummond read his polished verses, Ben snorted. "Not bad, not bad, young man," he said condescendingly, "but they smell too much of the trivial modern schools. Read Quintilian—he will tell you the faults of your verses as if he lived with you—read Horace, and Ovid, read Catullus, Juvenal, Martial." Bluntly he told Drummond that he was too modest and simple to amount to much. "Look at me,"

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he said ponderously, "I have never allowed my modesty to make a fool of my wit." He boasted on and on. He was better versed in Greek and Latin than all the other poets of England put together, and had five times their brains.

Drummond read some of his favourite lines from *Macbeth*. "Is not that passionately beautiful?" he sighed. "And they say Shakspeare never blotted out a line."

"Would he had blotted a thousand!" said Ben in a terrifying voice. "Everyone mentions it as an honour to Shakspeare that in his writing he 'never blotted out one line.' And when I say to them that I wish he had blotted a thousand, they think it a malevolent speech. I would not say it at all were not people so ignorant as to commend him for his greatest fault. And to justify my own candour, let me tell you I loved the man, and do honour to his memory (on this side idolatry) as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature, had an excellent fantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions. But he flowed with such facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped before he fell into things which could not escape laughter. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so, too! But, after all, he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned. But — Shakspeare lacked art." And Ben spit into the fire.

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Drummond questioned him about Sir Philip Sidney, whose divine sonnets he adored.

"He was no pleasant man in countenance," said Ben, "his face was spoiled with pimples, from his high blood, and his son the Earl of Worcester looks exactly like him. His daughter the Countess of Rutland, though, writes as well as her father. Sir Thomas Overbury was in love with Lady Rutland a few years ago, and he asked me to read some of his poems to her. Which I did, very excellently, and moreover I praised the author. But the next morning I discorded with Overbury, because he wanted me to pander for him and I would not. Of all things, young man, I like best to be styled 'honest.'"

"An honest man is one of the noblest works of God," Drummond breathed, and then: "Whom do you hold to be England's greatest poet?"

"Next to me," answered Ben, "only Fletcher and Chapman can make a masque, and I esteem John Donne the first poet in the world in some things, but he did his best work before he was twenty-five. Donne will not last, though, for no one can understand him. Sometimes he deserves to be hanged, for not keeping his accents. Sometimes, too, he is profane, and full of blasphemies, but I have many of his lines by heart, which is a compliment I don't pay everyone."

Ben read many of his own verses, pointing out the best parts for Drummond's guidance, but in the end



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he dissuaded the Scotchman from poetry altogether. "It is a series of persecutions," he said, bitterly. "God threatens kings, kings threaten lords, and lords threaten poets. They put me in prison under Elizabeth and nearly hanged me, one of them almost cut off my ears for writing against the Scotch, a whole band of them accused me of popery. Besides, poetry is a beggar's game. I'm as poor as a church mouse, when I might have been a rich lawyer, a physician or merchant. My wife often told me that, and I thought she was only nagging."

"What was your wife like?" asked Drummond.

"A shrew, yet honest," Ben replied, and then he told his host about the countless women he had had in the taverns and in various London houses; how a man had wanted a poet in his family and was delighted when his wife confessed her son was not his, but Ben Jonson's. Ben roared as he told this, and it led him to the story of the woman who got her husband to consent to her lying with a clergyman that she might give birth to an angel.

Drummond blushed and winced and smiled politely, but Ben was off now, and for the whole evening he related his foul jests and then got sick over the Turkey carpet.

THE next night Ben was ill and peevish, and talked on and on against Inigo Jones. "If I wanted words to



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express the greatest villain in the world, I would call him an Inigo," he grumbled. " Jones accused me once of having named him a fool behind his back. I denied it, but I said: ' I didn't say you were a fool, but I did say you were an arrant knave, and I still avouch it,' and the old fool told the King, but it didn't do him any good."

Then Ben began drinking again to raise his spirits, and told in a loud voice exactly why Queen Elizabeth remained " the Virgin Queen "; and why women fed beautiful young men muscadel and eggs; and how Sir Henry Wotton was interrupted in the pleasures of Venus; and just before he staggered off to bed, he whispered confidentially about the predicament of the man who occupied his wife artificially, which was the King's favourite story.

Drummond's concept of the divinity of poets crashed about his ears.

And every night, when his burly guest had gone to bed, Drummond tiptoed about and wrote down all he could remember of their conversations. He recorded Ben's determination to write the great English epic; he put in his note-book Ben's statement that John Donne was as obscure as Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and his contempt of Shakspeare for shipwrecking men in Bohemia, " where there is no sea near, by some hundred miles."

He wrote down Ben's excellent story about disguising

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himself as an astrologer and deceiving a lady of his acquaintance, and the account of how, when his play *The Silent Woman* was first acted, there were found verses on the stage concluding that the play was well named, for there would never be anyone to applaud it.

✓ He wrote a short account of Ben's life, as Ben himself had related it to him beside the fire, and with a blush on his delicate face he noted several of Ben's foulest stories, and his rough comments upon everyone of importance in England.

(Ben had defended his own sharp tongue and pen with vehemence. "If men may by no means write freely or speak the truth but when it offends not," he had said sharply, when Drummond had murmured against a particularly harsh epithet, "why do physicians cure with sharp medicines or corrosives? Is not the same equally lawful in the cure of the mind that is in the cure of the body?")

Drummond's note-book became fuller and fuller as the nights went by, and as he recorded Ben's desire to enter the Church, "that he might once preach his mind to the King without flattery," Drummond murmured, piously: "God forbid!"

FINALLY Ben decided to return to London.

He had jotted down, while at Hawthornden, a few

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rough sketches for various pieces of writing. Among them he was considering an antiquarian work on Scotland, and he carried away with him maps of the lakes, curious accounts of old symbols and ceremonies, and Drummond's lavish description of a bed-cover embroidered "all with gold and silk by the late Queen Mary, mother to our sacred sovereign."

He bought a new pair of shoes, and presented the old ones, full of holes, to Drummond for a keepsake. He slapped his host familiarly on the back and departed.

As Drummond watched his guest disappear in the direction of London, he heaved a sigh of relief. He threw the stinking old shoes into the pig-pen, removed the pile of empty winebottles from Ben's bed, perfumed his hands, and wrote, for his own remembrance, his true opinion of England's greatest poet.

"He is a great lover and praiser of himself; a contemner and scorner of others; given rather to lose a friend than a jest; jealous of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink, which is one of the elements in which he liveth;) a dissembler of ill parts which raigne in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth; thinketh nothing well but what either he himself or some of his friends and countrymen hath said or done; he is passionately kind and angry; careless either to gain or keep; vindictive, but, if he be well answered, at himself. He is for either religion, being versed in both."

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Drummond read over his outburst with satisfaction. Then he said his prayers, thanking God he was not a drunkard, and retired to his first peaceful sleep in two weeks.

Ben walked all the way back to London, and arrived there in April, in time to attend the funeral of the Queen.

He had worn out two pairs of shoes and lost over ten inches of belly. But the obsequious attentions of tavern-keepers soon restored him to his former size, so that when he sat for his portrait, he told the painter he could be faithfully represented on canvas by one great blot.

For several months after the death of the Queen there were, of course, no masques. And then, when the preparations for a most elaborate one were nearly completed, a torch fell into a pot of glue, and Whitehall burned to the ground.

While Inigo Jones was evolving a Venetian palace to serve as a new banqueting-hall, the impatient Court left London and proceeded upon a series of visits through the country.

Ben accepted a humble invitation to Oxford and took up lodgings at Christ Church with an adoring and obedient senior. Jonson wallowed in the academic dust. He caressed ancient manuscripts and coughed and sneezed in the old library. He wrote several masques and at times quitted Oxford to accom-

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pany the Court on its progresses. But as soon as possible he hurried back to the quiet town of colleges and buried himself in musty parchments. He saw no one.

One day in the middle of the summer a fellow, panting and disarranged, rushed into the office of the Chancellor of the University. He gasped. Was it possible — in the library he had seen the unmistakable figure of the poet laureate of England, staggering under the weight of an enormous folio — could it be that the learned Jonson was in Oxford unheralded? The Chancellor was aghast. Shocked and mortified that the King's poet should have been ignored and unrecognized, they hastened to make amends.

The Chancellor, masters, wardens, deans, all hastened to Ben's chamber. They bowed, apologized, scraped. Gruffly Ben consented to a celebration.

Soon, on a hot July afternoon, one of his comedies was presented before the entire University body. And at the end of the play, as the students cheered and whistled, the Chancellor draped Ben in a velvet gown and conferred upon him the degree of Master of Arts.

Pompously and ponderously Ben swaggered between two lines of excited undergraduates. Noisily he devoured roast swans and peacock pies, jovially he responded to toast after toast. Groaning under their burden, seven students carried him to his room.

WHEN the pedantic James heard that his poet laureate

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had been created Master of Arts, he swore with joy. He announced his intention of knighting Ben, of making him Sir Benjamin Jonson. But the nobility screamed loudly and frantically. A bricklayer become a baronet! Ben was a good fellow — but there were limits. The protest was so overwhelming that James contented himself with doubling Ben's pension and promising that he should be made Master of the Revels — that is, as soon as the two other people to whom he had made the same promise should die.

As a matter of fact, Ben never became Master of the Revels (and indeed the days of his own revels were just about ended), but it was a pleasant berth to look forward to during some of the dark days that were to follow.



THE Muses must be fed generously. Good meats and sound wines fire and invigorate the brain. They heat the imagination into sending forth dazzling and glittering beams. An ascetic diet cramps and chills a poet's temper; it is a frost to the fancy, and nips the flower of poetry in the bud. The sustained inspiration necessary to a cadenza of divine poetry is often found in



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"two mutton-chops well peppered" and a hog'shead of Canary-wine.

In the Apollo room of the Devil Tavern Ben Jonson practised these generous maxims with a rare skill. Here he reigned, not a king among kings as in the Mermaid, but as sole autocrat and Grand Mogul of "the tribe of Ben." This company of chosen sons was composed mostly of the younger men in London and students from the universities, all of whom worshipped "Father Ben" as the dazzling sun in the heavens of poetry. The great room of the tavern was barred to all but them, and over the chimney, engraved in marble and gold, were the "Convivial Laws for the Tavern Academy," drawn up in Ben's most elegant Latin.

For these lyric feasts young Robert Herrick and his noisy friends rushed down from their classes at the universities. Their fellow students wondered at their vivacious spirits and sparkling wit when they returned, but no one ever learned the mysteries of the club, for one of the Latin rules threatened that

*Whoever shall publish what's done or what's said  
Be banished for ever our assembly divine.*

Soon after his high honours at Oxford Ben was begged by some of the students to form such a club and to

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rule supreme, and for four years the festivities blazed and sparkled, behind locked doors. The women who were brought in for the pleasure of the gay company were always blindfolded, and the only hints of the character of the revels (in addition to the presence of the ladies) were the great noise and the huge pile of bottles and kegs found outside the door in the morning.

ONE night, as the revelling was roaring loudly, a young man dashed into the tavern, pounded at the sacred door, and rushed in. In a shrill voice he announced that the King was dead.

All murmured excitedly, questioned, and wondered. Suddenly someone noticed that Ben was acting queerly. His face, usually so fiery red nowadays, was a pale green, and he clutched the table, swaying. As all looked at him, paralysed with amazement, the glass of wine which he held in mid-air crashed to the floor and was shattered to bits.

At the noise he seemed startled. He trembled violently. Then he collapsed into a chair and burst into loud, slobbering sobs.

FOR once, Ben Jonson wrote a sincere elegy. In James he lost the most indulgent of masters, the most benevolent of patrons. For James and Ben were much alike, in their fondness for classic learning and for strong

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drink. But James's successor was of a far different sort.

While James was an easy and good-natured old pedant, his son Charles was an exquisite gentleman. Even as a boy he had been fastidious as to manners, and as he grew older he became increasingly severe as to morals. No one, for instance, who had been once seen the worse for drink was ever again admitted to his presence.

The young Queen Henrietta Maria, too, could scarcely be expected to care much for Ben. Her fastidious French breeding, heightened by the delicacy of a *précieuse*, shrank from the ruggedly English and bloated figure of the old poet.

It is easy, then, to feel Ben's grief, and his sickening fears, as he wrote his elegy upon James I. And yet, despite his flattery and humility before the elegant Charles, his pension was sharply stopped less than a week after the coronation.

FOR over twenty years Ben had been gathering books. Old monastic vellums, huge folios, and quartos, tiny books from Italy, overflowed a large room in his house. Few men in England had a library so rich and rare, and when Ben inherited hundreds of Camden's old volumes, his shelves attracted scholars from all parts of the kingdom.

Now, with his pension stopped and nothing saved,

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with no calls for his luxurious masques, the books had to go. Slowly one volume followed another. One shelf was emptied during the first year. At that rate, surely —

But one cold winter night Ben was awakened by loud shouts and by a harsh crackling sound. Rushing out, he found the library a mass of flames, a furnace of burning books. Groaning and cursing, he watched the flames mount higher and higher and then die down. Besides the hundreds of books, the flames destroyed some of his own writings, unpublished, irretrievably gone. Copious notes to Horace's *Ars Poetica*, a scholarly history of the reign of Henry V, a poetical account of his journey to Scotland, commentaries upon the early Christian philosophers — all went up in the flames.

And some have said that when the fire finally died down, scraps of charred and greasy rags were found besides the remains of *The Faerie Queene*.

THE death of his old king, his swift reduction to poverty, the stunning loss of his only resources — all came within a year. And as the ruins of his house were being raked over by salvagers, Ben fell to the ground — a quivering mass of fat in a paralytic stroke.

His young "sons" did what they could, but they were most of them poor.

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Two months later he sat up in bed and, shaking with the palsy, began desperately upon a new play.

One morning, as he wrote, mumbling feebly to himself, a messenger from the King stepped jauntily into the room. Eager and trembling, Ben opened a little packet and found — ten guineas. Fiercely he threw them at the messenger. His voice quavered with anger.

"His Majesty has sent me ten guineas because I am poor and live in an alley; go and tell him that his soul lives in an alley."

Pulling the bed-clothes about him, he continued writing and mumbling.

*The New Inn* was finally finished and played.

It failed miserably.

As the curtain fell, an actor stepped forward and began the melancholy epilogue:

*"If you expect more than you had tonight,  
The maker is sick, and sad. . . ."*

But the audience would not listen. They howled and hissed and demanded their money.

When Ben heard of the failure of his play, and when even his young admirers from Oxford reproached him for his declining art, he borrowed a few pounds and published a scathing "Ode to Himself," "begat by the just indignation of the author at the vulgar censure of his play by some malicious spectators." It was

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full of his old sting and vigour, and sarcastic replies swamped the printers.

Even the exquisite Charles was touched by the courage of the old bedridden poet, and he amazingly ordered his pension restored, with the addition of an annual keg of Canary-wine.

This unexpected generosity helped Ben's spirits, and when, shortly after, he was commanded to write a new masque, in combination with his old enemy Jones, he produced a gay and humorous one, which pleased the Court enormously. And then, into his poor lodgings flocked dozens of courtiers, who told him boisterously that the King had created him City Chronologer, which everyone knew to be a sinecure, a salaried title. The future looked so bright, and the old poet felt so wealthy, that he spent his first half-year's salary in advance, in purchasing the library of a decayed earl.

But there were few bright days ahead.

When his newest masque was published, it was discovered that the friendly printer had put Ben's name in huge letters in the middle of the page, and "Inigo Jones, architect," in tiny italics in a corner. The jealous architect hopped in rage. He complained piteously to his friends at court, and their combined petitions influenced the King to pass Ben by when the time came for a new masque. In his place Inigo Jones presented Aurelian Townshend to the attention of the



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Court. Townshend's masque was not poetically pleasing, but was so gorgeous architecturally that the barbaric taste of Whitehall loudly acclaimed it — and the juggling Charles transferred Ben's pension to the delighted Townshend.

"Townshend!" muttered the sick Ben to himself, remembering that young gentleman's verses.

*"He writes a verse as smooth, as soft, as creame;  
In which there is no torrent, nor scarce streame."*

These women's poets! You may sound their wits and find the depth of them with your middle finger. They are cream-bowls, or but puddle-deep."

Jones forced his protégé to share his riches with him, but, even so, Townshend was better off than Ben, who now had to depend solely on his thirty-three pounds a year from the city.

And now most of the thirty-three pounds went to the old woman who lived with him and cooked for him and propped him up on pillows. Neither he nor she took much care for next week, and would be sure not to want wine, of which he usually took too much before he went to sleep, if not oftener and sooner.

Then one day came a harsh order from the Court of Aldermen, suspending his salary as City Chronologer "until he shall have presented unto this court some fruits of his labours in that place." Despite pleas and protests, the order remained.

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So once more Ben wrote against time and beggary. But *The Magnetic Lady* failed as greatly as *The New Inn*, and young Thomas Carew told Ben how Inigo Jones sat in the theatre and cackled with brutal laughter. "He grew fat with laughing," the young student said, indignantly, as he pressed a note into Ben's hand. Ben cursed. "Natures that are hardened to evil, like his, you shall sooner break than make straight; they are like poles that are crooked and dry: there is no attempting them." He shook his big head.

Some people, indeed, were amazed to hear that a new piece of Ben's was being played. His person about the streets had been so obvious and unmistakable that when he disappeared from public places for so long a stretch, they wondered vaguely and presumed he was dead.

In fact he had thought of death a good deal lately, for one day as he wrote *The Magnetic Lady*, young Carew had told him that Drayton was dead and buried. Tears ran down the old man's cheeks — Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Drayton, old Camden, all of them gone — the tears of sorrow turned gradually into tears of fear and self-pity and terror. Horrified, he thought of his early plays, full of blasphemy and ribaldry, and *The Magnetic Lady* he made mild and inoffensive.

"What a deal of cold business does a man mis-spend the better part of life in!" he said to Carew one day.

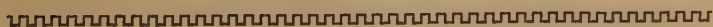
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"In scattering compliments, tendering visits, gathering and venting news, following feasts and plays, making a little winter love in a dark corner." Carew nodded sympathetically, but he wondered about the compliments. He had heard very few of Ben's making.

The play which Ben looked back upon with the most complete satisfaction nowadays was *The Devil is an Ass*, which shows the Devil so overcome with the wickedness of this world that he considers himself merely an ass in comparison.

So he was stunned, a few weeks later, to receive a brusque visit from the Master of the Revels (whose place he himself still hoped some day to fill). Dazedly he heard himself charged with having written, recently, a filthy and blasphemous play. Ill and bewildered, he could not think or reply, and it was not until the actors themselves were questioned that the truth was found. They confessed themselves to have introduced the oaths into their parts, without Ben's authority or even knowledge. Sobbing, they were led off to prison.

But Ben suspected dully that their wills had not been entirely free, nor their actions spontaneous. Jones and Townshend were being fêted all over the kingdom.



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THE failure of his play, the false charge of blasphemy, the cruel actions of Jones, and the sudden death of Drayton weighed so on Ben that during the night he had a second stroke, and his old attendant rushed screaming through the streets for aid.

For weeks he lay in a semi-conscious state, always seeming to see Inigo Jones's sharp sneering face looming up before him. The thoughts of Jones made him choleric and restless. Few came to see him except a few students from the universities, who remained his adoring disciples. When they came, Ben might sit up and feel more content, and brag on and on, amusing himself with them. Then, when they went and the old house became quiet and lonely, he would spend whole hours lying "looking at his great toe, about which he saw Tartars and Turks, Romans and Carthaginians, fight in his imagination."

Various young scholars were continually sending to their sick master little treatises on pentameter and hexameter, which he read with a half-contemptuous, half-affectionate interest.

ONE day Michael Oldsworth, an obscure youth living in the London suburbs, decided to make a poetical journey from London to Southampton. With a friend

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he set out from Westminster Abbey, and their first stop was Ben Jonson's chambers. But Ben was sick and mournful and peevish that day, and he scolded and moralized and preached in a very dull fashion. As the youths were leaving, one whispered to the other: "You'd think he was a bishop, rather than a playwright." His voice was not quite low enough, however, and he ducked just in time to avoid a book which was hurled from the direction of the bed.

It was fortunate for him that Ben did not see the poetical result of his visit:

*Behind the Abbey lives a man of fame;  
With awe and reverence we repeat his name,  
Ben Jonson: him we saw, and thought to hear  
From him some flashes and fantastic Gear;  
But he spake less. His whole Discourse  
Was how Mankind grew daily worse and worse,  
How God was disregarded, how Men went  
Down even to Hell, and never did repent —  
With many such sad Tales; as he would teach  
Us Scholars how hereafter we should preach.*

*Great wearer of the bays, look to thy lines,  
Lest they chance to be challenged by Divines:  
Some future Times will, by a gross Mistake,  
Jonson a Bishop, not a Poet, make!*

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THE old woman potted about continually with bottles and vials, and gradually Ben came to himself.

Again he wrote a play, *The Tale of a Tub*, in which old Jones was bitingly satirized. The play pleased the audience, but the peevish architect ran to the King and had it stopped. The Earl of Newcastle, however, was looking for someone to write an entertainment he was to give the King, and the pleasure which he derived from *The Tale of a Tub* gave him determination to seek the now unfashionable Ben. Ben produced two charming pageants, and the King was so pleased that he listened favourably to Newcastle's plea, and ordered Ben's salary as Chronologer paid, together with the back pay. And Newcastle himself paid Ben liberally for his work.

Ben's financial worries were now for ever over. The Earl of Newcastle proved a kindly patron, and his gifts were large. But Ben's health, his fame and popularity, seemed quite gone. His huge body was limp and helpless, and he spent the long days alone, usually, studying and dreaming. Occasionally he had a period of brightness and vigour and became restless, imperative. On one such occasion he had the old woman dress him in his gorgeous velvets, and was carried to the Devil, where he gave the last of his great suppers. The rooms of the old inn were full of students from Oxford and Cambridge, a few London men. They



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hung on his every word, as he talked about his old friends, now all dead.

Condescendingly he talked of Shakspeare, affectionately of Chapman and Drayton and Beaumont and Fletcher, scornfully of Samuel Daniel, bitterly of the triumphant Inigo Jones. Ben's chair was a little throne that night, and he boasted and bragged and drank almost as much as in the old days.

He gave advice to his young admirers.

"If your wits do not suddenly arrive at the dignity of the ancients, do not cast away your quills yet, nor scratch the wainscot, do not beat the poor desk; but bring all to the forge, and file again, turn it anew. There is no statute law of the kingdom which bids you be a poet against your will or before the first quarter. If it come in a year or two, it is well. Be like Virgil, who brought forth his verses like a bear, and formed them with licking.

"The common rhymers pour forth verses (such as they are) extempore, but there never came from one of them one sense worth the life of a day. I have met many of these rattles, that made a noise and buzzed. They had their hum, and no more."

It was all the old man could do to refrain from giving concrete examples of "rattles, that made a noise and buzzed." Indeed, later in the evening, under the influence of Canary, he did.

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He talked on and on about himself. "The first speech in my *Cataline*, spoken by Sylla's Ghost, was written after I parted from my boys at the Devil Tavern. I had drunk well that night, and had brave notions. There's one scene in that play which I think is flat, and I resolved to mix no more water with my wine."

And he told how when his favourite brewer died, he could write no successful plays for months.

The next day one of the students wrote to a friend:

"I was invited yesternight to a solemn supper, by B. J., where you were deeply remembered. There was good company, excellent cheer, choice wines, and jovial welcome. One thing intervened, which almost spoiled the relish of the rest — that B. began to engross all the discourse, to vapour extremely of himself, and by vilifying others to magnify his own muse. Thomas Carew buzzed me in the ear that although Ben had barrellled up a great deal of Aristotle, yet, it seems, he had not read the *Ethics*, which, among other precepts of morality, forbid self-commendation, declaring it to be an ill-favoured solecism in good manners. . . . You know, be a man's breath ever so sweet, yet it makes one's praise stink if he makes his own mouth the conduit-pipe of it. But, for my part, I am content to dispense with the Roman infirmity of Ben, now that Time hath snowed upon his pericranium. . . ."

But the drinking that he did that night did Ben no good and he never left his bed again. His disease be-

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came more and more violent, his body puffed and swelled, the slightest movement caused intense pain.

And yet in the midst of this suffering he began another play. The fragments which exist of *The Sad Shepherd* are scenes from an exquisitely beautiful pastoral drama, a soft picture of a western Arcadia, fresh and charming.

Indeed, the groves of Arcadia, the old man wrote, vie in beauty with the dells and glades of Parnassus, where the poets go after they die. . . .



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GRADUALLY the old man became weaker, until he could do nothing but lie still and dream.

Pictures floated and whirled in his mind. His duel with the Spaniard — how far away that seemed. The ghost of Gabriel Spenser, pale and handsome, the peevish brawlings of Henslowe and Marston — his first day at court, when the haughty old Queen nodded not unkindly to him, and stretched out a jewelled hand — the quiet, repressed figure of Jane, with her two dead children — everything floated in deep space. And then his speedy intimacy with James, the gorgeous court Masques, the boisterous celebrations in the taverns — for twenty years he had lorded it in London,

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and now he could scarcely move, his sight grew weaker and weaker, everything seemed blurred and distant. . . .

But Charles continued to send the kegs of Canary, and in Canary the old man could still find consolation. Consolation came also, still, with the visits of the boys from the colleges, their adoring worship and affection. The kindly old Earl of Pembroke was dead, but Lord Arundel and the Earl of Newcastle came often, bringing rare old books, which the old poet caressed, but could barely see — delicate and fine wines. The gratuities of the Earl of Newcastle, Ben wrote, “fall like the dewe of heaven on my necessities.”

The King himself came in, one afternoon, followed by a brilliant group of nobles. Rather coldly he reached out his hand to be kissed, and after frowning a moment he granted Ben his last favour — “eighteen square inches of ground in Westminster Abbey.” Charles did not stay very long, but bowed in a dignified way and waved a languid hand. Eighteen square inches would suffice, Ben explained, since he desired to be buried in a standing position. It would make him the more ready for the resurrection.

And then one afternoon two young fellows from Cambridge dashed up the stairs to see Father Ben and found his huge body lying limply on the floor, and the old woman sitting weeping in a corner, helpless and

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terrified. — As the two boys lifted the heavy burden to the bed, they wondered at a small white scar, in the shape of a T, which appeared with glaring brightness on Ben's left thumb.

All of Oxford and Cambridge came to London, and, followed by hundreds of students and members of the Court, six of those who had known Ben the best bore the most English of the poets into the old Abbey. He was buried within a few paces of the graves of Chaucer and Spenser, and beside his two old friends, Drayton and Beaumont.

DURING the next year enthusiastic undergraduates went about collecting funds for a memorial to their old "father," but before the monument could be erected, England was plunged into civil war, and only a plain square of blue marble told those who knew.

But one day an indignant passer-by gave a near by workman eighteenpence, and the next day, in large carved letters, a pious Latin inscription appeared in the stone. "Pray for Ben Jonson," it said — "ORARE BEN JONSON." But nobody reads Latin when he can read English, and since the space between the first two letters is rather vague anyway, the inscription quite naturally seemed to say: "O RARE BEN JONSON."

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Shortly after his death a book appeared, full of verses to his memory by all the poets of England, but the most sincere and significant tribute to Ben was the number of new signs which soon began to swing above tavern doors. There were, in the late seventeenth century at least five London taverns named "Ye Jonson Head."

IN the middle of the eighteenth century a marble bust of Ben appeared in the Abbey. On its base was carved the old inscription, now clearly "O RARE BEN JONSON."

The carver made another mistake. He violated sartorial etiquette by cutting the buttons on the left side of the coat and the holes on the right. One day the verger of the Abbey discovered some verses scribbled on the bust:

*If Ben's pale Ghost, at Noon of Night,  
(Like Cæsar's shadow on the Stage)  
Should rise and contemplate the sight,  
How would his growling Spirit rage!*

*Why, what a Jack-an-apes is here!  
This meant for me! Away, be gone!  
Why, this would make a Parson swear!  
A Turn'd coat, too! Zounds! Turn'd to Stone!*



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*Give me my other Coat again,  
And place me where I was before;  
This cannot be me, the Famous Ben,  
This is some upstart son of a whore.*

But it occurred to the verger that Ben would not be nearly so indignant at the feeble bust and the reversed buttons as he would be at the reference to Shakspeare's *Julius Cæsar* in the very second line of the effusion itself.

THE original stone was taken up when the old nave was repaired, early in the nineteenth century, and the Dean of the Abbey found it lying neglected in the stone-yard. Carefully he ordered it brought into the church and fitted into the north wall of the nave, where it still remains. The small triangular lozenge which is now over the grave bears a copy of the old inscription, except that the name is spelled with an H.

In 1849 Sir Robert Wilson was buried close by, and the pavement was taken up. The clerk who superintended the operation saw the loose sand of Jonson's grave ripple in like a quicksand, and he saw the two leg-bones of Jonson fixed bolt upright in the sand, as though the body had been buried in the upright position. And, frozen with horror, the clerk saw Ben's skull come rolling down among the sand, from a posi-

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tion above the leg-bones to the bottom of the newly-made grave. There was still hair upon it, and it was of a red colour.

Ten years later another grave was dug near by, and the skull was seen once more. It still had traces of red hair upon it.

## A NOTE ON CONSTRUCTION

AFTER one has read the large mass of tradition and scholarship concerning the life and works of Ben Jonson, one emerges into the more vivifying air of independent meditation, and discovers that one has, despite the set-backs of contradictions and uncertainties, evolved a definite conception of the man Ben Jonson, his friends, and his surroundings. This poetically \* true conception I have set down on paper. The fragmentary and scattered data have been the "bricks and stones" of my construction.

*The Jonson Allusion Book*, which is an attempt to gather together all references to Ben Jonson in English literature, contains very few allusions to Ben before 1598, the year of the first presentation of *Every Man in His Humour*. Beginning at this date the allusions begin to appear more frequently, and they refer to both Ben and the play. This fact makes it quite certain that Ben was comparatively unknown up to 1598, and also that *Every Man in His Humour* was a great hit. The question that fronted me as I wrote the ninth

\* "Poetry is a more philosophical and a more serious thing than history. For poetry is chiefly conversant about general (universal) truth; history, about particular. In what manner, for example, any person of a certain character would speak or act, probably or necessarily — this is universal; and this is the object of poetry. But what Alcibiades did, or what happened to him — this is particular truth."

— Aristotle, *Poetics*, ix.

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chapter was, "How did the audience act at the first performance of the play, that afternoon in 1598?" Now contemporary engravings have preserved for us the appearance of the theatres, we know the exact words to the prologue of the play, and it is probable that, since the author was an obscure person, speculations concerning his identity would be made by the audience at the first performance. The further behaviour of the audience I have decided upon by comparing Ben's play with other popular shows of the same period, and examining the behaviour of audiences at some of the latter (as portrayed, for example, in Dekker's *The Gull's Hornbook*). The fourth quantity of this proportion, then, was my answer.

John Fletcher's poems to Ben Jonson, as well as the poems of Robert Herrick, and Fuller's *English Worthies*, tell us that many feasts of the poets took place in the old Mermaid Tavern, and they tell us exactly who attended the feasts. The old taverns are gone from London now, but Dickens knew what they were like, and such a book as *Pickwick Papers* is full of descriptions of taverns as old as the Mermaid. What I wanted to find out in writing the fourteenth chapter was, what the men who frequented the Mermaid were really like, and what such men would be most likely to say to each other. The former problem is, of course, part of the main problem of this book. The latter is the sort of question which brings into play our general

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knowledge of our friends and enemies, and this particular instance of the question makes useful the conversations in the old Boar's Head Tavern in *Henry IV*, and in the taverns and public places in Ben Jonson's own *Every Man in His Humour* and *Bartholomew Fair* and *The New Inn*.

There are facts concerning Ben Jonson which are not in this book. Some have been omitted because they are uninteresting, and would make dull reading. A few others, which may or may not be entertaining, and which are possibly authentic, have been omitted because they are uncharacteristic — poetically false. Ben's remark to Inigo Jones is a case in point. Despite the fact that he had insulted the architect upon every possible occasion for years, and was going to do so for many more years, on one occasion Ben softened the insult (at least in his own opinion). He felt that he would be going beyond the limits of decency to call Jones a jackanapes, and so he merely called him "a thing like a thing like a man." Although to our ears the latter may seem the stronger epithet of the two, Ben considered it a conscious softening. To include an incident of this sort would be to mar the representation of what is to me one of Ben's most vivid traits, supported by a huge majority of instances. There are, obviously, not many omissions of this sort necessary for my purpose, and my conception, based upon the facts, conflicts with but few of them.

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The date of Ben's reconversion from Catholicism seems to be uncertain. Ben himself told Drummond he was "twelve years a papist," but the placing of this period differs slightly in the various authorities. We know from the *Conversations* that Ben was suspected of popery, and questioned, at the time of the appearance of *Sejanus*, in 1603 or 1605. We also know, from court records, displayed in the new Oxford Jonson, that with his wife he was called before the London Consistory Court in 1606 for habitually absenting himself from communion and for being "by fame a seducer of youth to the popish religion." The *Conversations* tell us also that when Ben did forswear Rome, he drank the wine as I have recorded. The dates of the two accusations are so near together, and the charges are so nearly identical, that I have thrown them together into what is practically one incident.

Ben's long discussion of Shakspeare with Drummond is composed of sentences taken and reshaped from the *Conversations* themselves, and from Jonson's collection of marginal notes called *Discoveries*. The passages on Shakspeare from the *Discoveries* may be conveniently seen in their original form in *The Oxford Book of English Prose*. Two or three of the epigrams which I have put into Ben's mouth come, actually, from the works of Robert Herrick. This may be taken as one way of paying the debt which Herrick owes (he



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avouches it himself) to Ben. The epigrams are wholly, I think, in character.

Of Ben's plays only *The Alchemist*, *The Silent Woman*, and *The Fox*, probably, seem exciting to us nowadays. Some people like *Bartholomew Fair*. Dozens of Ben's lyrics, though, remain among the most exquisite and delicious things in all literature. The masques make pretty dull reading, except for the lyrics they contain, and they need Inigo Jones, after all, to make them go. Ben's marginal notes upon his reading, which he called *Discoveries*, are interesting in spots, and contain some typically vigorous similes and a good deal of charming self-revelation, especially in the parts which seem to have been done in Ben's old age.

The *Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden* have been attacked, recently, as a forgery. Whether one considers them authentic or not, they are poetically absolutely true. Few writings are as fascinating as these snatches of Ben's conversation, coloured by the personality of the transcriber. Gifford's *Memoir* of Jonson, too, is interesting — all the more so because of its amusing prejudice in Ben's favour. John Aubrey's *Brief Lives* contain valuable contemporary bits of information concerning Ben and his friends.

Among more recent books the three I remember as being the most enjoyable reading are Miss Sullivan's on the masques, Professor Adams's on the Shaksperian

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playhouses, and Professor Schelling's on the Elizabethan drama. *The Jonson Allusion Book* has been of great assistance, and the first volume of the new Oxford Jonson contains several interesting anecdotes.

As for this book, it might not have happened had I not had the privilege of hearing Professor John Erskine's lectures on the Elizabethans. It would certainly not have appeared in its present form without the constant, suggestive, finished, and invaluable frank criticisms of Mr. H. K. Dick. Mr. Wilson Follett has given me many stimulating suggestions. I thank them sincerely.









